NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY SERIES

6 .08

TATYA TOPE

INDUMATI SHEOREY

H
N.B.B-5
6708

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

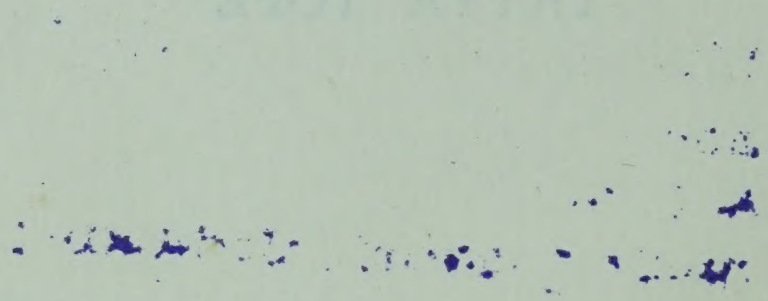
15-2

6708

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE-1

(44)

5/8



Dr (Mrs) Indumati Sheorey *b.* 1917 took her Doctorate from the Nagpur University. She has worked as a sub-editor of 'The Independent', an English weekly in Nagpur, has been Assistant Producer—Marathi at AIR, Nagpur. At present she is working in Union Public Service Commission, New Delhi.

Some of her major publications are: *Shapit Ani Usshapit* and *Apamanit*—short story collections and *Marathi Katha—Ugam Ani Vikas*—a history of the origin and development of Marathi short story.

NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY SERIES

TATYA TOPE

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಗಾಂಧೀ ಸ್ಮಾರಕ ನಿಧಿ (ರಿ)
ಪರಿಗ್ರಹಣ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ: 2984
ACC. No.:
ಗಾಂಧೀ ಗ್ರಂಥಾಲಯ, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು-1

INDUMATI SHEOREY

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE-1

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA
NEW DELHI

January 1973 (Pausa 1894)

© *Indumati Sheorey, 1973*

Rs. 3.50

Sole Distributors:
THOMPSON PRESS (INDIA) LTD.
19, Malcha Marg, Chanakyapuri,
NEW DELHI-21

PUBLISHED BY THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA,
A-5, GREEN PARK, NEW DELHI-16 AND PRINTED AT
THE NATIONAL PRINTING WORKS, 10, DARYAGANJ, DELHI-6

FOREWORD

TATYA TOPE has become a legendary figure in the tempestuous happenings of 1857. However, the important role he played in the independence struggle of 1857 is not yet generally realized. Actually, the overall struggle could make its impact only due to his generalship, and a fitting tribute has not been paid to this hero who has really contributed so much to that effort.

The present short sketch of his life puts all the facts fairly before the public and I hope will be useful to bring his remarkable life to the notice of the public.

B. V. KESKAR

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE-1

CONTENTS

		Page
	FOREWORD ..	v
I.	A Saga of Heroism ..	1
II.	From Obscurity to Fame ..	3
III.	The Gathering Storm ..	8
IV.	Sitting on a Volcano ..	16
V.	Revolt at Kanpur ..	26
VI.	Tatya as a Military Adviser ..	40
VII.	Tatya as a General ..	51
VIII.	The Marathon Race ..	77
IX.	Capture and Execution of Tatya ..	90
X.	The End and the Beginning ..	98
	APPENDIX—	
	Was Tatya Tope Really Hanged? ..	104
	BIBLIOGRAPHY ..	110

I A SAGA OF HEROISM

TATYA TOPE, popularly known as 'Tantia Topi', was one of the greatest military leaders that the revolt of 1857 threw up. His was an unknown name till then. But the dramatic events of 1857 catapulted him from complete obscurity into sudden prominence. Before the great rebellion broke out, he was a sort of companion—*musahib*—of Nana Saheb, Raja of Bithur, and the eldest son of the dethroned Peshwa, Bajirao II. But, after Kanpur joined the freedom struggle, Tatya rose to the position of a general in the Peshwa's army. During the warfare that followed, he shot up like a meteor and left a blazing trail behind him. His name became a byword not only at home but also abroad. His heroic exploits were watched with eagerness and anxiety by friend and foe alike, were extensively reported in the newspapers, and they elicited admiration even of his opponents. As Col. Malleson said of him, "He was the most gifted of all the military leaders India produced in that hour of crisis." Sir George Forrest spoke of him as "the ablest nationalist leader", while a modern English historian, Percy Cross Standing has hailed him as "the biggest brain produced on the native side by the mutiny"; he has also described him as being "one of the most famous guerilla leaders of the world".

Of the two trail-blazers of 1857, the Rani of Jhansi and Tatya Tope, the former got the greater share of popularity. There is a halo round her name. But Tayta's daring and

triumphs were no less dazzling than hers. While the Rani's exploits were limited to the restricted field of Jhansi, Kalpi and Gwalior, Tatya strode like a colossus all over—from Kanpur to Rajputana and Central India. If Col. Sir Hugh Rose, who was in over-all charge of the Central India campaign, praised the Rani as "the bravest of them all", he said in a letter to Maj. Meade, that Tatya also, possessed the "greatest enterprise... and the most enduring resolution in character" and that "his talents for organization were also remarkable". Tatya, more than any other leader, shook the very foundations of the mighty British Empire. He gave the longest fight to the enemy. When one by one they all fell before the superior military might of the British, he alone held aloft the banner of the rebellion. He eluded for nine long months more than half a dozen veteran British commanders who were trying to net him. He remained unbeaten. It was only through treachery that the British could finally catch him.

The achievements of this great patriot are enshrined in the pages of history. The saga of his heroism is full of grandeur and enterprise and is as romantic and inspiring as the epic struggle itself.

II FROM OBSCURITY TO FAME

Early Life

Not much is known of Tatya Tope's earlier life. Some facts about him can be gleaned from the statement he made after his arrest and some from the deposition made by Ramkrishna Tope, Tatya's step-brother, before the Assistant Resident of Baroda in 1862.[1]

Tatya's real name was Ramchandra Pandurang Yewalekar and 'Tatya' was only an *alias*, while 'Tope' was a nickname which stuck to him. His family originally belonged to Yewale, a small place in Patoda district (near Nasik), and hence the surname 'Yewalekar'. Tatya, in his statement made in 1859, gave his age to be 45 years, which gives us 1813/1814 as the year of his birth. A Deshastha Brahmin, his father was a learned man, as befitted his caste, and while searching for some gainful employment, he shifted to Poona, the then capital of the Peshwas, with the help of Trimbakji Dengale, then an important courtier. It was also through him that he was introduced to the last Peshwa, Bajirao II, who employed him as a priest in the palace. With his learning, integrity and sound judgment, he rose to the position of the supervisor of the Peshwa's Religious Endowment and Household Department.

Tatya was hardly four years old when the fortunes of his

---

[1] "Source Material for the History of the Freedom Movement in India", Govt. of Bombay, vol. I, p. 235.

father's master underwent a sudden change. Bajirao was defeated by the British in the battle of Basein in 1818. He lost his empire. He was granted an annual pension of Rs. 8 lacs and was removed far away from his capital—obviously to obviate the possibility of any mischief he might make to regain his lost kingdom—to Bithur, a pleasant little town on the banks of the Ganges, 12 miles from Kanpur. There he built a huge palace for himself and spent most of his time in religious activities. Tatya's family shifted there with the Peshwa.

Childhood Companions

Tatya grew up into a fine, ambitious young man, spending many years in the company of the three adopted sons of Bajirao—Nana Saheb, Bala Saheb and Baba Bhat. The popular story that Nana Saheb, his brothers, the future Rani of Jhansi whose father later became a courtier of the deposed Peshwa, and Tatya, all of whom were prominent leaders of the revolt, used to play war-games together in their childhood and that they learnt heroic stories of the Marathas, from which they drew inspiration for the revolt, has been called by some historians as 'apocryphal'[1]—part of a legend woven by the romantic minds round these heroes! But the fact that all of them were intimately connected with the Peshwa's family and that they must have often come together, irrespective of their ages and position, cannot be denied. The memories of the lost

[1]Dr. Surendranath Sen: 'Eighteen Fifty-Seven', p. 220.

empire were too fresh to be dimmed. To regain it and to avenge its loss must have been one of the many youthful dreams of Nana and his brothers who proved to be so unlike their effete father.

Military training Tatya did have some, but military experience he had none. Along with the sons of the Peshwa, he had received martial training like an average youth of his day. But whatever knowledge he must have had of fencing and shooting, it hardly qualified him for the role he was destined to play. But it seems that he had "inherited the natural instinct of his Maratha race for guerilla tactics"[1], as was amply testified by the way he eluded capture by the British generals.

As stated in Ramkrishna Tope's deposition, Tatya was the second of the twelve children his father had. He had seven brothers, one real and six step-brothers, and four sisters. Though Tatya with his wife and son lived separately, for all practical purposes it was a joint family.

A Distinct Personality

Tatya was not much to look at, but he seems to have had a distinct personality. John Lang who saw him at Bithur, was not impressed by his appearance. He described him as "a man of middle height, say five feet eight, rather slightly made but very erect. He was far from good-looking. His forehead was low, nose rather broad at the nostrils and teeth irregular and discoloured. His eyes

[1]Ibid, p. 231.

were expressive and full of cunning, like those of most of the Asiatics, but he did not strike me as a man of eminent ability."[1]

The 'Bombay Times' correspondent, who met Tatya after his capture, wrote in the issue of April 18, 1859, that Tatya is "neither handsome nor ugly but he is intelligent. His demeanour is quite calm and restrained.... He is of robust health and of middle height."

The other descriptions that have come down to us tell that Tatya had finely-drawn eye-brows, high cheek bones and a broad jaw indicating a determined and intelligent mind. He had a rich shock of hair and a thick moustache. He had a good knowledge of Marathi, Urdu and Gujarati which he could speak with fluency. Of English he knew next to nothing except to put his signature. He spoke haltingly but distinctly in a measured style but in a telling manner and could carry the audience with him. The fact that he could often win over to his side troops with uncertain loyalty speaks of Tayta's gift of speech and power of persuasion.

A Restive Spirit

Bithur offered little scope for Tatya's abilities and ambitions and that he must have grown restive there, is obvious from the fact that he went to Kanpur and took service with the East India Company. But he soon came back disappointed. He then tried his hand at money-

[1]J. Lang: Wanderings in India and Other Sketches of Life in Hindustan, pp. 410-11.

lending for some time but gave it up as it was totally alien to his temperament. As his father was already heading the Peshwa's Household Department, Tatya had no difficulty in entering his service as a scribe. But he was not happy with his lot.

A story tells us how Tatya came to be called 'Tope'. Impressed by this young scribe's ability, astuteness and cleverness in exposing the treacherous designs of one of the employees, the Peshwa in a special durbar decorated him with a *topi* (cap) bedecked with nine jewels. And Tatya was hailed by the audience as 'Tatya Topi'.

After the death of the Peshwa in 1851, Nana became the Raja of Bithur, and Tatya became his chief scribe. Like-mindedness drew them closer than ever before and very soon he came to be known as Nana's *musahib*. No one then could have had the least inkling that destiny had chosen this plain-looking non-descript clerk to play a major role in the cataclysmic events that were soon to shake the massive edifice of the British Empire and that he would earn for himself a place of glory in the annals of Indian history.

III THE GATHERING STORM

When Tatya appeared on the scene, almost the whole of North India was aflame. Sepoy mutinies had broken out at Meerut, Delhi and several other places in U.P. These mutinies had merged themselves into revolts of civilian populations under local leaders. The country was engaged in a supreme struggle to rid itself of the foreign rulers—the arrogant "Ferangis" who had come to India as traders and had become masters.

The "Company Bahadur"

Strangely enough, the "Company Bahadur", as the East India Company was called by the people, was not aware of the gathering storm which was to engulf them with unexpected fury. No doubt some faint rumblings had been heard as early as January that year but it would appear that no one had taken any serious notice of them. There was no doubt that there was disaffection and discontent in the army; its mutinous spirit was revealed when the Mangal Pandey incident took place. Strange things were happening, like the mysterious distribution of *chapatis,* or red lotuses, or the circulation of the treasonable proclamations about *jehad,* one such was pasted on the walls of Delhi's Jama Masjid! Rumours were afloat about the Persian and Russian armies coming to oust the "Ferangis" from this land. There was tension and uneasiness in the air. But that did not disturb the

complacency of the "Company Bahadur".

And they had ample reasons to feel smug and complacent. Their power was firmly entrenched in India and in 1857 it presented a most glorifying picture. After the Battle of Plassey the Indian map had changed completely. The rival French imperialism was made to retreat to a few small pockets; Hyder Ali's hurricane raids had been finally silenced; the Afghans stood humbled; the sturdy little Gurkhas subdued; and Burma annexed. The Emperor of Delhi was now a mere pensioner and the high and mighty Marathas with their swift-footed armies which had overrun the length and breadth of the country, had been laid low. Thanks to Dalhousie's 'Doctrine of Lapse', the remaining small kingdoms and principalities were toppling like houses of cards. The British supremacy was complete.

Causes of Revolt

The causes that led to the revolt of 1857 are well known. "It was greased cartridge and only greased cartridge," said Sir John Lawrence. But the greased cartridge alone could hardly have caused such a mighty holocaust. Indeed the greased cartridge, suspected by the sepoys to be a covert instrument of conversion to Christianity, was, so to say the last proverbial straw that broke the patience of the sepoys. Prior to that, several military innovations such as the one directing sepoys to trim their luxurious beards to a specified pattern, the replacement of the Indian turban with a leather cockade (it proved to be the cause of a

mutiny at Vellore), the insistence on their going on a sea voyage during the Burmese Wars (forbidden in Hindu religion)—were resented by the sepoys who considered these as encroachments on their religious beliefs. But the Company Government paid little heed to their susceptibilities.

In fact, for various reasons, resentment against the British had been building up gradually over the years in all strata of society. Proselytising activities of the missionaries were on the increase as the Charter Act of 1813 had thrown India open to all private individuals. "The ban was removed from the missionaries," averred a contemporary, "the lock was struck off the church-doors, the scriptures were permitted to be circulated. For the first time our Christian government ceased to oppose diffusion of Christianity in India."[1]

The Various Reforms

Immediately following the Charter Act (1813) came the reforms of William Bentinck which abolished *sati* and infanticide. Act XXI of 1850 enabled the converts to inherit ancestral property. All this aroused people's suspicion who considered it as interference in their religion. Land reforms in Bengal, Bihar and U.P. had antagonised the landlords. With the British administrative reforms, the feudalistic structure of society was completely changed; it is affected almost all classes and their

[1]Russel, W. : *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, Introduction : Michael Edwards, p. xxi.

age-old professions. To cap it all came Dalhousie's 'Doctrine of Lapse' with its steam-roller campaign of annexation which, more than anything else caused widespread disaffection.

Bad Faith

Most of the native rulers, who were the main participants in the revolt had a grouse against the British. The Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, resented the fact that the treaties the British had entered into with his grandfather, Shah Alam, were not being respected and the Emperor was now reduced to being a mere 'pensioner' instead of being the 'master' that he was. Rani Laxmibai's Jhansi had been annexed because the adoption of an heir by her had not been approved. Nana Saheb as the rightful successor of the Peshwa, was being denied the right to his father's pension. Added to these had come the annexations of Satara, Nagpur, Sambalpore and numerous other small states. Still having some faith in British justice, many sent their agents to plead their cause in England. But none of them got justice. Whatever faith the native rulers had in British justice died with the annexation of Oudh. It was not so much the fact of annexation but the disgraceful manner in which it was done that turned the rulers against the British. Malleson has rightly observed that "the real cause of the mutiny was bad faith. It was bad faith to our sepoys which made their minds prone to suspicion; it was our policy of annexation, of refusing the Hindu chiefs the permission to adopt—with

them a necessary religious rite, of bringing the whole people under the operation of complex rules to which they were unaccustomed, breaches of customs more sacred to Hindus than laws, which ranged large landowners and rural population against British rule. Greased cartridge became dangerous in this background."[1]

The Dividing Gulf

Bad faith could have been undone if the British knew how to go about it. But the fact was that they never understood their Indian subjects. A wide gulf divided the rulers and the ruled. "As the English became conscious of their power," says Michael Edwards, the Editor of 'Russel's Diary', they became more aloof and inaccessible, and that necessary concomitant of an imperial government, contempt for an inferior and conquered people, shows more and more as a characteristic of the ruling class."[2]

The clevage between the ruler and the ruled had become total. William Howard Russel, the war correspondent of the London 'Times', who toured India in 1858 to enquire into the circumstances of the failure of the British rule in India which had been brought to light by the mutiny, has described how the worlds of the two—the Europeans living in the cantonments and the native inhabitants living in the city and bazar—were separate. "There is no bond of union between the two in language, in faith or nationality. The West rules, collects taxes,

[1]Malleson: *History of Indian Mutiny*, vol. III. p. 472.
[2]Russel: op. cit., Introduction, p. xx.

gives balls, drives carriages, attends races, goes to church, improves its roads, builds its theatres, forms its Masonic Lodges, holds 'cutchery' and drinks pale ale. The East pays taxes in the shape of what it grows on the taxed land, grumbles, propagates, squables sits in its decaying temples, washes in its failing tank and drinks its semi-putrid water. Between the two the gulf is fixed."[1]

The Haughty Alien

This gulf could never be bridged. The British, unlike the Mughals, remained aliens to their subjects. An alien rule is always distasteful, specially when the alien is haughty, imperious and insolent, as the British rulers were then and that rule had to be overthrown.

But the haughty alien was unable to see that the country was seething with discontent. Thus "the rapid march of unthinking progress, administrative streamlining, the threat of the railway, all pressed heavily on the Indians. Princes lived under the shadow of annexation, landowners feared investigation into their titles, the soldiers anticipated attacks on their caste. But the Government seemed to move with the indifference of the mills of God, and an alien God at that, until all was ripe for rebellion."[2]

Few Discerning Men

Yet there were a few discerning men among the rulers who could see signs of the gathering storm and prophesied

[1]Russel: op. cit., pp. 29-30.
[2]Ibid, p. xxii.

its coming. Henry Lawrence pointed out that the army would be the first to break, while others like Evans Bells had cautioned against the high-handed administrative methods of Lord Dalhousie.

Col. Chester, in his letter of April 13 to Maj.-Gen. Hearsey, wrote that from the heights of Simla it seemed that the agitation over cartridges was subsiding and that all danger was at an end. And that also was the view held by the staff at Simla. But Capt. Martineau, who was commanding the musketry depot at Ambala, spoke differently in a letter he wrote on May 5 to Capt. S.H. Beecher, the next in command to Col. Chester. This letter describes the state of mind of the sepoys just five days before the outbreak of the mutiny :

"We make a great mistake in supposing that because we dress, arm and drill Hindustani soldiers like Europeans, they become one bit European in their feelings and ideas. I see them on parade for only two hours daily, but what do I know of them for the rest twentytwo hours?

"What do they talk about in their lines? What do they plot? For all I can tell I might as well be in Siberia!

"I know that at the present moment an unusual agitation is pervading the ranks of the entire native army, but what it will exactly result in, I am afraid to say. I can detect the near approach of a storm, I can hear the moaning of a hurricane, but I cannot say how, when or where it will break forth.

"Why, whence the danger you say? Everywhere, far and near. Army under some maddening influence are

looking out with strained expectation of something, some unseen invisible agency has caused one common electric thrill to run through all.

"I don't think they know themselves what they will do or that they have any plan of action except of resistance to invasion of their religion and their faith... But good God! here are all the elements of combustion at hand... They no longer believe us, they have passed out of restraint and will be off at a gallop before long.

"If a flare-up from any cause takes place at one station, it will spread and become universal."[1]

Capt. Martineau's words were indeed prophetic. The mutiny broke out at Meerut on May 10, five days later.

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Fraser Town (East), BANGALORE-5.

[1]J.A.B. Palmer: The Mutiny Outbreak at Meerut in 1857, p. 33.

IV SITTING ON A VOLCANO

If Capt. Martineau's discerning eyes could clearly see the writing on the wall, though only just before the storm, the staff at Kanpur, or for that matter in the entire country, had no such inkling, not even as late as March or April. Sir George Trevelyan bemoans that "it seems miraculous indeed that our countrymen in India should not have entertained any idea of what those months would bring forth. It appears incredible that officers should have lived their ordinary lives, hunting, dining, dancing, speculating on the probable height of the thermometer and possible chances of promotion, while within a few yards of their quarters men were debating their programmes of the coming mutiny, arranging who was to shoot down the adjutant and who to fire the thatch of the colonel's bungalow, discussing their hopes of assistance from Gwalior, Nepal and St. Petersburg."[1]

The Wronged Peshwa

Kanpur was, in fact, one of the most inflammable spots in northern India. Close to it lived Nana whom the British had treated shabbily. After Bajirao's death Nana was not allowed to inherit either his title or his pension. The ex-Peshwa had by a will left all his property to Nana and accordingly the latter took possession of his

[1]Sir George Trevelyan: "Cawnpore", p. 41.

father's property which was huge even in comparison with the colossal wealth of many an Indian land-holder. But the British Government discontinued the pension on the ground that it had been a personal grant to the late Peshwa and that it was not hereditary and, therefore, the Peshwa's sons could have no claims on Government's charity as the income left by the Peshwa was amply sufficient. Nana and his advocates argued that the pension was granted to the Peshwa "for the support of himself and his family" and as such the family had every legal claim to the pension irrespective of what the Peshwa had saved during his lifetime. Nana accordingly presented an appeal to the Governor-General for continuation of the pension and the jagir but it was rejected. He then sent his *vakil*, Azimullah Khan to represent his case before the Board of Directors in England, but the Governor-General's decision was upheld by the Board. Many English men have commented that whatever the legal position, equity demanded that some portion of the pension should have been conceded to the family.

Not an Inch of Land

There was yet more in store for Nana. The Regulation Act of 1832 had exempted the Peshwa and his family from the jurisdiction of the ordinary British law courts. One year after the Peshwa's death the Act was repealed, with the result that it reduced Nana and his brothers to the status of common men. But what was worse was the fact that, with the Peshwa's jagir gone from their hands, the family was left with not even an inch of land anywhere, as Nana was

only granted a life-interest in the Bithur lands. A touching story is told how its realization hurt Nana on the occasion of his father's *shraddha* ceremony. Whenever a Peshwa died the Brahmins, according to the prevailing custom, used to receive five major *shraddha* gifts—*maha danas*—of elephants, horses, gold, jewels and land. Nana performed Bajirao's *shraddha* ceremony on a grand scale, but he could not gift away any land, as he had none. Sardar Raghunathrao Vinchurkar who attended the ceremony, was so touched by Nana's predicament that he humbly offered his own *inam* villages for the purpose, which, he argued, in any case originally belonged to the Peshwa. Nana, it is said, could not hold back his tears at the display of such selfless devotion on the part of an ex-subject of the Peshwa.[1]

Of course, it never occurred to the British to oblige Nana by making any similar offer. They were blissfully indifferent. Take another instance, the Government's refusal to permit Nana the use of his father's seal. After all, as Sen says, in the eyes of the common people Nana was the Peshwa's rightful heir and even the English men had not denied him the courtesy title of Maharaja. The use of the seal would not have added much to his political stature.[2] And the Government could easily have spared Nana further humiliation. But the British, when so minded, could sometimes make a fuss over even small technicalities. The Commissioner of Bithur objected to the use of the Peshwa's seal. So Nana made another seal,

[1]Itihasa Sangraha : Aitihasik Sphut Lekha, Part III, p. 26.
[2]Sen : op. cit., p. 126.

but this was considered even more objectionable, because in it he had styled himself as "Peshwa Bahadur". Its use was immediately forbidden. Nana had to eat the humble pie and rest content with a simple "Shriman Nana Dhondu Bahadur."

The Gracious Host

The Government was unwilling to grant any concessions to Nana, but its officials were nevertheless only too willing to avail themselves of his sumptuous hospitality. They thronged to his balls and banquets. If Nana felt wronged by the British, he did not outwardly show it. He was as charming as ever and lavishly entertained the British officials at Kanpur. "His reception-rooms sparkled with mirrors and chandeliers that had come direct from Birmingham," says Trevelyan, and "dressed in his panoply of *kinkhab* and Cashmere scarf, crowned with a tiara of pearls and diamonds and girted with old Bajirao's sword of state which reports valued at three lacs of rupees"[1], Nana used to play the gracious host to his European guests.

He was dignified and graceful in his manner. "He moved freely amongst his guests, enquired about the health of a major's wife who had not turned up, cracking jokes with the Assistant Magistrate about some humorous incident in the court, congratulating a judge on his promotion or paying compliments to the fair ladies on their charming manners and graces."[2] But his guests could not reciprocate his

[1]Trevelyan: op. cit., p. 64.
[2]Ibid, p. 53.

hospitality as, according to Mowbray Thomson, "he would accept none of their hospitality in return because no salute was permitted in his honour."[1]

It was reported that Nana exhibited a keen interest in the activities of the English Government at home and abroad, and in their history, arts, religion and customs. Though he was ignorant of their language, he subscribed to all Anglo-Indian journals and had engaged one Mr. Todd to read them to him.

Trevelyan says that though Nana obliged English officers by his favours and hospitality, "he never forgot for an instant the grudge he bore against our nation. While his face was all smiles, in his heart of hearts he brooded over the judgment of the Company and the wrong of his despised claim. From his hour of repulse to his hour of vengeance, his life was one long journey."[2] Be that as it may. Nana's hospitality and amiable behaviour had won him the confidence and good opinion of the local officials, so much so that when the crisis came they turned to him for help.

Kanpur's Strategic Position

Situated on the southern bank of the Ganges, Kanpur was a first-class military station. In the spring of 1857 it had acquired further importance. After the annexation of Oudh, it was considered necessary to maintain a strong garrison at Kanpur, as it commanded the Grand Trunk

[1]Mowbray Thomson: The Story of Cawnpore, p. 48.
velyan: op. cit., pp. 68-69.

Road from Peshawar to Calcutta and also the highway which led to the bridge to Lucknow. It was also a link with the South *via* Kalpi. In view of its strategic position, it was strongly garrisoned with the 1st, 53rd and 56th Native Bengal Infantry, II Cavalry and a company of artillery, the native force totalling not more than 3,000 as against 64 European artillery men with 6 guns. Maj.-Gen. Sir Hugh Wheeler was the officer commanding who had a fifty years' record of meritorious service. He had served under Lord Lake and had participated in the capture of Delhi in 1804. Later he had earned a name for himself in the Afghan and the Sikh wars. As Sir Henry Lawrence said, he proved to be "the tower of strength at this juncture."

Kanpur had a fairly big European settlement with a population of about 1,000 of Europeans or people of European extraction. The Europeans lived in the cantonment and had all the facilities and trappings considered necessary for the ruling class. They had a church, a race-course, a theatre, a club, Freemason's Lodge, assembly rooms for dinners and dances and a breakfast club. The community lived in seclusion, away from the native population living in the city area. They led an exclusive and gay social life, quite oblivious of the discontent seething in the hearts of the natives.

Symptoms of the Storm

At the beginning of 1857 the condition of the native army was said to be unsatisfactory to the highest degree. There were "symptoms that a bad spirit was abroad. Discipline

was lax and insubordination was afoot."[1] By the spring of 1857 there were obvious signs of the approaching disaster. After the revolt of Mangal Pandey, "the atmosphere was alive with rumours. Strange, though insignificant bits of warning and prediction heard with reverent credulity passed from mouth to mouth through millions of households. Beyond all question," says Trevelyan, "some secret influence was at work to advertise, so to speak, the mutiny. There was a feeling that something was in the air, was coming rapidly, the like of which was never known before."[2]

A prophesy had been long current that the 100th year of the Battle of Plassey would bring the downfall of the Company's rule. And this was the 100th year.

Of late a mandate had been circulated from the Delhi Fort "enjoining the Muslims to recite at all their solemn gatherings a song of lamentation indicted by the royal musician himself which described in touching strains the humiliation of their race and degradation to their ancient faith."[3]

The First Blow

The first blow was struck at Meerut on May 10. On the 11th, Delhi was captured. The news of the revolt reached Kanpur on the 14th. If the news disturbed Wheeler, he did not show any sign. There was no overt evidence of any disaffection among his soldiers. "All quiet at Kanpur" was his report to the Governor-General on the 18th.

---

[1]Ibid, p. 16.
[2]Ibid, p. 16.
[3]Ibid.

But what caused him greater worry was the telegraphic reply from the Government that a European force was being sent for whom accommodation was to be arranged. If the news about the despatch of the troops got abroad, he feared it would warn the sepoys that their fidelity was suspect. On the 21st, II cavalry got restive as a rumour got afloat that they were to be dismounted and disarmed. An outbreak was feared any moment. The following day a force of about 55 Europeans and 140 *sowars* did actually arrive from Lucknow. But it was not big enough to intimidate them, and Kanpur remained quiet, though it was an uneasy calm as both sides suspected each other. The Europeans apprehended the repetition of Meerut and Delhi, while the sepoys warned their comrades "to keep a lookout as mischief was intended by the *Saheb log*". They could see Wheeler preparing himself for any contingency. An entrenchment to house the Europeans was being improvised. The native guards at the treasury and the magazine were replaced by Europeans. That they were not trusted was obvious, and it made them sore.

The Growing Tension

As ill luck would have it, a consignment of rotten *atta* (wheat flour) appeared in the market about the same time, and it was sold at cheaper than normal rates. Rumour spread like wild fire that powdered bones of cows and pigs were mixed in the flour. No wonder the sepoys got agitated! Though the suspicion proved to have no basis whatsoever, they remained unconvinced.

To live in this atmosphere of mutual distrust was a nightmare for the Europeans. Every moment they expected the blow to fall. At the slightest alarm or suspicion of unrest, "*buggies*, *palkies*, *gharies* and vehicles of all sorts drove up to the entrenchment and discharged cargœs of writers, tradesmen, ladies, suckling infants, *ayahs* and children and officers too"! and returned home when the alarm proved false.

Nana's Aid Sought

As tension mounted, the authorities at Kanpur sought Nana's aid. Accordingly, Nana along with Tatya promptly arrived at Kanpur with a force of 300 men and two guns. He was appointed tc guard the treasury in Nawabgunj, five miles away from the entrenchment.

Did Nana volunteer his services or was his aid and presence sought by the authorities? This pertinent question has been variously discussed by historians. While Shepard, a Eurasian clerk in the Commissioner's office, holds the first view, Mowbray Thomson, one of the four survivors of the Sati Chaura Ghat tragedy, categorically asserts that "Nana did not volunteer his services, but Mr. Hillersdon after consultation with Sir Hugh Wheeler sent over to Bithur requesting the aid and presence of Nana Saheb". Thomson's account could be held more reliable, as being a commissioned army officer he must have had a better access to the collector and the officer commanding. It also tallies with Tatya's last statement that Hillersdon wrote to Nana requesting him to come with his retinue and

guard the treasury. So he went with Nana and "the Collector...said it was fortunate we (Nana and Tatya) had come, as the sepoys had become disobedient". This took place on May 22.

Wheeler's Entrenchment

On May 23 all the European women, children and non-combatants took shelter in the entrenchment. The entrenchment which the sepoys resented as an evidence of British distrust, was almost a misnomer. It consisted of two one-storeyed brick-built barracks, one of which had only a thatched roof. It was a hastily constructed place of shelter for the Europeans against sudden attack. The trench was not sufficiently deep and the mud parapet was weak and hardly one-man high. The witty Azimullah named it as "a fort of despair".

This was the situation at the end of May. With the atmosphere of mutual distrust, mounting tension, nerve-racking suspense and the two sides pitched against each other, Kanpur was sitting on a volcano which could erupt any moment and engulf the city.

V REVOLT AT KANPUR

THAT CRUCIAL MOMENT came when a European officer in a state of intoxication fired upon a small patrol of II cavalry. He was court-martialled but was acquitted on the plea that the offence was committed in a state of mind when he was not responsible for his actions! Another sore point with the sepoys. Why was the officer's action condoned? Obviously because he was of the ruling race! Had any native fired at a European, he would have been hanged without much ado. "They muttered angrily and openly that their own muskets might also be discharged by accident some day." The sepoys drew their own conclusions. They sulked but remained quiet. Yet whatever bonds they felt they had with their masters were snapped.

On June 3, Wheeler's spies brought the news that the revolt was imminent. Evacuation was immediately ordered. The following day provisions for a month were stored in the barracks and one lakh of rupees were brought from the treasury into the entrenchment.

On June 4, II cavalry mutinied and the 1st Infantry promptly joined them. Next, the 56th also responded. Though the 53rd had remained loyal so far, by some mistake they were fired upon. "The men were peacefully occupied in their lines, cooking, when Ashe's battery, by Wheeler's command, opened on them and they were literally driven from us by nine-pounders."[1]

[1]Thomson: op. cit., pp. 39-40.

Nana Takes the Lead

As could be easily anticipated, the rebel sepoys then rushed to the treasury at Nawabgunj where Nana was keeping guard. He made common cause with the sepoys and distributed the cash amongst them. The sepoys released the prisoners from jail, raided the magazine and captured ammunition. They then marched towards Delhi, making the first stage of their halt at Kalyanpur on June 5. Wheeler must have heaved a sigh of relief when he saw the troops march off to Delhi because he had forecast that like the rebels at other places, Kanpur sepoys also would follow the popular rebel cry of "*Delhi chalo*". But this expectation was belied when the troops unexpectedly returned to Kanpur the next day and Nana informed the dismayed general that they were going to attack the entrenchment.

What brought the sepoys back from Kalyanpur? What made Nana do such a *volte face*? Was he play-acting in some deeply-laid plan? Or was he a prisoner of circumstances which were foreseen neither by him nor by others?

Our information regarding the Kanpur mutiny is very meagre, and all we have is a mass of contradictory evidence. Divergent opinions on this subject have been expressed by historians. Those who believe that the outbreak of 1857 was a well-organized conspiracy to overthrow the British, suggest that Nana who masterminded the revolt, was only play-acting the part of a charming hospitable prince to instil confidence among the British officers, while all along he was in league with the sepoys, thus waiting for a suitable

opportunity to take his revenge. He successfully hoodwinked the enemy and seized the opportunity when he was posted to guard the enemy treasury. According to another account, "a deputation of some native officers went to sound the intentions of Nana and suggested that 'a kingdom awaits you, Maharaja, if you join our enterprise but death if you side with our enemies'. And Nana replied, 'What have I do with the British? I am altogether yours.'"[1] The authenticity of this story has been questioned by others.

Tatya deposed that Nana was forced to join the sepoys and assume their leadership under duress. As a devoted follower of Nana and himself a rebel, Tatya's statement cannot be taken as unvarnished truth. Since they were fighting a patriotic war against the hated British, they could hardly be expected to disclose the whole truth. (It is indeed a surprising coincidence that all the four leaders of the mutiny—Nana, Tatya, Rani of Jhansi and Bahadur Shah—were unanimous in stating that they were at the mercy of the rebellious troops, and yet all of them, beyond any doubt, put their hearts in the fight.)

Forrest too discounts the story of the forcible conversion of Nana. Kaye who believed that the 1857 revolt was preplanned, remarks that "for months, for years indeed, ever since the failure of the mission to England had been apparent, they (Nana and his *vakil* Azimullah) had

---

[1]Sen: op. cit., p. 138.

been quietly spreading their network of intrigue all over the country."[1]

Sen is of the view that the logic of events indicates that the sepoys felt the need to have a leader of high rank and played upon Nana's fear and ambition, who eventually placed himself at their head after some initial hesitation."[2] The whole drama is thus shrouded in mystery. We can only say with certainty that when the rebel regiments, persuaded either by Nana or his agents, returned to Kanpur on June 6, Nana had assumed their leadership. As soon as they were back from Kalyanpur, they hailed Nana as their 'Raja', and three officers assumed command of their respective corps—Subedar Tikka Singh became chief of II cavalry as General, and Jamadars Dugunjan Singh and Gangadin as Colonels of the 53rd and 56th NI, respectively. With a grand procession of flags on the back of an elephant, it was proclaimed by the beat of drums that Nana Saheb's reign had begun.

The same morning Nana sent a letter to Gen. Wheeler that he was going to attack the entrenchment, and thus the seige of the entrenchment began.

Seige of the "Fort of Despair"

The entrenchment, as already mentioned, was a frail structure. In this "Fort of Despair" were huddled together 900 souls. Of them about a half were women and children, 400 were British fighting men, of whom 70 were invalids.

---

[1]Sir John Kaye: *A History of the Sepoy War in India*, vol. I, p. 578.

[2]Sen: op. cit., p. 138.

The rest were Indians who included 50 servants. Against this small force were pitted 3,000 armed sepoys. But though the enemy was despicable in number, in spirit it was not. The British fought with grim determination and doggedness against heavy odds. Each able-bodied man, whatever his profession, was expected to fight. Arms and ammunition they had in plenty, but food was not so plentiful. After the first few days, there were occasions when the food was supplemented with a stray bull, or a horse or even a common cur. Many died of starvation. Water was another problem. In the scorching heat of June, the besieged suffered intensely from thirst, as there was only one well in the entrenchment, and that too without any protecting cover. Anyone attempting to draw water became an easy target of the sharp-shooters. The thin walls of the barracks hardly provided any protection against burning heat; consequently many fell victims to sunstroke. As though these difficulties were not enough, the thatched roof caught fire as a result of the sepoys' bullets and the fire took toll of some. Disposal of the dead presented another major difficulty. So under cover of night, the corpses were thrown pell-mell into another well nearby.

It was a terrible war—a war of hatred and vengeance. Both sides had thrown humanity to the winds. Thomson is on record as saying that the prisoners were despatched unceremoniously without any reference to the headquarters!

Tatya's Hour of Test

The seige lasted from June 6 to the 25. It gave

Tatya the first opportunity to show his military ability. It appears that, as Nana's military adviser now, he planned the attack on the European garrison. In this he was ably helped by some of the experienced officers of the Bengal Army. Sub. Tikka Singh (now promoted as general), Jamadars Duganjan Singh and Gangadin (now promoted as colonels), Jwala Prasad, the Commander of Nana's own troops, all these had long military service to their credit. Tatya also secured the support of Nunney Nawab *alias* Mohammad Ali Khan, a local wealthy Muslim nobleman, who was placed in command of the artillery. He also had a detachment of gunners and drivers from Oudh Artillery to operate the guns. Tatya's ranks further swelled when the armed retainers of many local zamindars rallied behind Nana. Soon, another contingent of Oudh soldiers of the Nadiri and Akhatari Regiments under the command of Mir Nawab joined them. With the magazine already in their hands, they were well equipped with the necessary arms and ammunition.

Tatya lost no time in launching an attack on the British garrison. The guns were brought from the magazine and the attack began at 10 a.m. on June 6. The entrenchment was cordoned off by batteries, while all the surrounding out-buildings, bungalows and compound walls were occupied by the sepoys. The first assault was made on June 12, the cavalry leading the attack, but it was repulsed by the brisk fire of the enemy. Then the strategy of continuous vigorous bombarding and silencing the enemy guns was adopted.

The heavy shelling played havoc in the enemy camp. With depleting resources and fast-thinning ranks, the beleagured British did not hope to last long. Frantic appeals for help were made to Lucknow, the nearest station. But Lucknow, facing its own troubles, could spare none. Communications with Calcutta, from where the Governor-General's promised troops were to come, were completely cut off.

Neill's Atrocities

While Kanpur was piteously crying for help, Neill was busy suppressing the mutiny at Benaras and Allahabad, which was followed by a merciless spree of loot, arson and massacre. Immediately after the outbreak of the mutiny at Meerut and Delhi, Neill of the 1st Fusilliers Madras was summoned by the Governor-General and despatched to quell the revolt. A stern and ruthless officer, Neill did not believe in half-measures. He arrived in Benaras on June 3. Mutiny had already broken out at Lucknow, and next day came the news of revolt at Azamgarh. Neill suppressed the revolt with a mailed fist but did not rest content at that. He started a virtual reign of terror in which everything that came in his way fell. According to Kaye, he gave orders to Renaud to attack and destroy all places en route (to Kanpur)...occupied by the enemy. "Many villages had been burned by the way-side and human beings are none to be seen...the military officers were hunting down criminals and hanging them up with as little compunction as though they had been pariah dogs,

or jackals or vermin of a lesser kind,"[1] wrote Kaye. Volunteer hanging parties went out in the districts...one gentleman boasted of the numbers he had finished off "quite in an artistic manner" with mango trees for gibbets and elephants for drops, the victims were strung up as though for a pastime in "the form of figure of eight".[2] No wonder the natives called European soldiers "demons in human form". When Neill set out for Allahabad on June 9 with his 43 men, he could find no horses on the deserted roads, so "they drove in *palkigaries* which were dragged by the natives". He could not proceed to Kanpur speedily because, without the co-operation of the local people, he could not collect transport animals and carts.

To return to Kanpur. On June 23—the centenary of the Battle of Plassey—the second vigorous attack was launched, but this, too, was repulsed equally vigorously. Though the British garrison survived the ordeal, the end was not far. The next day Wheeler sent his final SOS to Lucknow. It was almost a last cry of despair when he wrote: "The British spirit alone remains, but it cannot last for ever. Surely we are not to die like rats in a cage!"

Wheeler Surrenders

The relief came not from the expected quarters but from the enemy. On June 25, Nana sent a message through one Mrs. Greenway, a woman of wealthy family of Kanpur, that "all those who are in no way connected with the acts

[1]Kaye: op. cit., pp. 135-36.
[2]Ibid.

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE-1

of Lord Dalhousie and are willing to lay down their arms will receive safe passage to Allahabad". The next day Azimullah and Jwala Prasad, as Nana's deputies, went for parleys. A treaty of capitulation was signed by which Wheeler agreed to surrender the garrison, the guns and the treasure, while each man was permitted to carry his arms and 60 rounds of ammunition. In return, Nana promised to provide the necessary conveyance for the women, children and the wounded and boats at the *ghat* ready with food supply.

Massacre at Sati Chaura Ghat

On June 27, elephants and *palkies* carried the fugitives to Sati Chaura Ghat, the place of embarkation, where 40 boats were kept ready. Then followed a ghastly act of crime which has been universally condemned. What actually happened none will ever know. Mowbray Thomson and Delafosse were the two lucky victims that escaped the massacre and survived to tell the terrible tale. According to them, the river was low, the boats had the gangways and the passengers had to wade through water. A huge crowd had assembled at the *ghats* to witness their former rulers depart. On a carpet spread on the platform of 'Har Deva's' temple sat Tatya, Bala Rao, Azimullah and Jwala Prasad. Nana was not present. As Thomson describes, "as soon as the last man had stepped into the boat, 'off' was the word, but at a signal from the bank,. . .all the native boatmen jumped over and waded to the shore. We fired into them immediately." The very troopers who

had escorted the English fugitives to the *ghat* opened fire which was returned. Then followed pandemonium. The troops and the ambushed guns on the *ghat* went into action, and the thatched roofs of the boats caught fire. Many were burnt to death, while many others were killed by musketry fire. The rest, mostly women and children numbering about 200, were taken prisoners. A single boat escaped but that too was seized later, but not before its four occupants had fled for their lives.

Bibighar Massacre

Out of the 200 survivors who were taken prisoners, the men were shot dead while the women and children (about 150) were lodged in a small place called Bibighar. On July 17, when the invading army of Maj.-Gen. Havelock approached Kanpur and the rebel leaders were convinced that they could hold Kanpur no longer, a party of sepoys was sent to shoot the prisoners through the doors and windows of the prison-house. But the sepoys fired only at the ceiling of the chamber. So some butchers were brought, on whose authority it is not clear, who butchered the unfortunate prisoners. The next day their dead bodies were thrown into a nearby well.

Atrocities at Kanpur

These two massacres at Kanpur have achieved the greatest notoriety amongst the episodes of 1857. School boys both in England and India have been fed with over-coloured accounts of these tragic events, whereas few

outside the circle of historians know about the more cruel massacres of the Indians, which accounted for several times the number killed at Kanpur.

Neill's savage and indiscriminate atrocities probably provoked the rebels to perpetrate the massacres. And his subsequent retribution, when he forced his victims to lick the blood of the murdered ones, was equally hideous.

But the well at Kanpur ever remained in the memory of the British in India. It even coloured their future attitude towards this country. Why? Surely, cruelty is not the vice of any particular nation, or any particular age, and humanity is always the first casualty in war, especially, if it is a national or racial war. To quote Russel: "We tortured our Jews once upon a time, as the Hindoos and Mohammedans mutilate their Christians now; and our crusaders—if not the knights at least their barbarous followers—gave scant grace to the Moslem. Helpless garrisons surrendering under capitulation have been massacred ere now. The history of medieval Europe affords many instances of crimes as great as those of Cawnpore; the history of more civilized periods could afford some parallel to them in more modern times and amid most civilized nations."[1] Perhaps Russel correctly puts his finger on the sore spot when he says: "In fact the peculiar aggravation of Cawnpore massacres was this that the deed was done by a subject race—by black men who dared to shed the blood of their masters. Here we had not only a

[1]Russel: op. cit., pp. 170-71.

servile war, but we had a war of religion, war of race, and a war of revenge, of hate, of some national promptings to shake off the yoke of a stranger..."[1]

These massacres are an undisputed fact of history. But their excessively lurid and played-up descriptions and the apportioning of blame on evidence which will not bear the least scrutiny, do not carry one anywhere. Nana, who has been described as a fiend, Satan and a scoundrel, is held guilty of these crimes by some historians, while others accuse Tatya Tope along with Azimullah, Jwala Prasad and Bala Rao of the treachery at Sati Chaura Ghat. There was said to be a premeditated conspiracy to lure the Britishers to the river and then massacre them. Though the story is based on very flimsy evidence, the presence of troops and guns, and also of Chauhan landlords on the riverside close to the boats, does indicate some pre-planning. But did Nana or Tatya have a hand in it? The fact has not been established beyond doubt. "In the absence of some proof," John Lang says, "I should be sorry—especially after the letters I have read on the subject—to attribute to the man (Nana) that fiendish treachery and horrible massacre.[2]" Col. Maude also expresses doubts about Nana having a hand in the episode.

Regarding Tatya's role in the massacre on the *ghat*, it has been said by some eye-witnesses that the killing started at a signal from Tatya who was sitting on the terrace of the

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]J. Lang: Wanderings in India and Other Sketches of Life in Hindustan, pp. 412-13.

temple watching the event. As we know, Tatya was placed in charge of making arrangements for the boats. According to Tatya's deposition, he "got ready 40 boats and having caused all...to get into the boats, I started them off to Allahabad...the sepoys jumped into the river and commenced the massacre". The signal which Tatya was seen to have given for starting the boats was misconstrued to be a signal for the massacre. Forrest writes: "Vibart (the last man to board) gave the word 'off'—a welcome sound after a weary month of incredible hardship and imprisonment...but the command fell on traitor's ears. The ominous sound of a bugle was heard and at the signal the crew leapt overboard."[1]

According to the testimony of Mowbray Thomson, as already mentioned earlier, *it was the English who fired the first shot* as the boatsmen abandoned the boats. Whether this provoked the sepoys who were already excited by the reports of Neill's barbarous atrocities, cannot be determined. As Sen says, if Nana as the head of the sepoys is to be held legally responsible, moral guilt must also be shared by Neill.[2]

In answer to Sir George Trevelyan's embellished accounts, which were mainly based on Nanak Chand's diary and the depositions of 63 witnesses before Col. Williams, Commissioner of Police of North-Western Province, we can only quote Forrest who wrote that "they (depositions) were full of discrepancies and must be treated with caution.

---

[1]Forrest: *A History of the Indian Mutiny*, p. 457.

[2]Sen: op. cit., p. 150.

Confidential reports from officials, unofficial examinations and petitions of private persons show that although the darkest tints predominate, the picture is not so black as has been painted. The evidence also proves that the sepoy guard refused to murder them (Bibighar prisoners). The foul crime was committed by five ruffians of Nana's guard at the instigation of a courtesan,[1]" presumably after Nana had fled to Bithur after his defeat at Kanpur.

We can only conclude with what Sir George Campbell says in his *Memoirs* that "we must remember two things: first, it was not done in cold blood, but in the moment of rage and despair when Havelock had beaten the rebels and was coming in; and second, we had done much to provoke such things....At a later time a careful investigation was made...and we failed to discover any premeditation or direction in that matter. Neill did things worse than the massacre."[2]

---

[1]Forrest: op. cit., Introduction, p. xi.

[2]*Memoirs of My Indian Career* by Sir G. Campbell, as quoted in Russel: op. cit., Introduction, p. xvi.

VI. TATYA AS A MILITARY ADVISER

With the last trace of British authority having been wiped out of the city, Nana's dream of revival of the Maratha Empire seemed to have come true. On June 30 he was proclaimed as the Peshwa amidst splendour and ceremonies reminiscent of the old days of the Peshwas. People of Kanpur and the surrounding villages poured into Bithur in large numbers to witness the grand event. While the feasting and the revelries went on for days at Bithur and proclamations were being issued "from the painted garden of the Peshwa" Tatya, wary and astute, did not entertain any false hopes about the newly revived Maratha Empire. He knew that soon the British troops would be on them with renewed vigour to gain their supremacy. He, therefore, wasted no time and set himself to the task of consolidating his troops for the defence of Kanpur.

During the seige, Nana had already taken over the government. He tried to set up a new administration which had completely broken down. The first task was to restore law and order and Nana took stern measures to establish his authority. A court was appointed under his brother, Baba Bhat for dispensing criminal justice, with Azimullah and Jwala Prasad as additional judges. Hola Singh was appointed *Kotwal* and Wasiuddin as *Kazi*. The supply of provisions to the army was entrusted to a citizen named Mullah. The old Hindu criminal law

which had prevailed before the annexation was revived. Thieves and malefactors were brought before the court and those found guilty were sentenced to mutilation and paraded in the streets on the back of a donkey.

But Nana's was not a Hindu State. With the outbreak of the revolt, the green banner of Islam was also unfurled, but there was no trace of the old communal acrimonies. There were many staunch Muslims who attended Nana's court and fully supported his regime. A common enemy had welded them all together to the cause. It seemed that they all wanted the revival of the past with all its institutions and the return of the good old days.

Tatya Organises Defence

The first encounter with the invading British army took place on July 10. Thus Tatya was hardly given a fortnight in which to organize his defence. His ranks had now swelled to 20,000, a large part of whom consisted of the retainers of the zamindars and native levies. There was no dearth of arms. He was also served well by a network of spies. He had no doubt superior numerical strength. But would that be a match to a well-organized and disciplined British army manned by a number of experienced officers and war veterans equipped with superior arms? Victory over Wheeler had inspired the rebel army with confidence. But would their revolutionary fervour alone be enough to overwhelm the army determined to fight tooth and nail for its survival? Tatya himself

had no experience of the actual battlefield. Nonetheless, he prepared for the defence of Kanpur in a series of skilfully planned moves. He deployed his men at several strategic points in such a way as to earn the admiration even of his opponents.

Havelock's March

While Tatya was thus busy organizing his defence, Havelock was preparing to advance for the capture of Kanpur and the relief of Lucknow. Havelock, with forty years' experience in the army, had distinguished himself in Afghanistan, the Punjab, and Persia. An austere man, "his little old figure looked as active and fit for use, as if he were made of steel", according to Lady Canning. Such a man was needed to keep the overbearing Neill in his place and recover the lost cities.

Havelock reached Allahabad on June 30, the day Nana was proclaimed Peshwa. The news of Wheeler's capitulation reached Havelock soon afterwards. Before he left Allahabad on July 7, an advance column under Capt. Renaud was already on its way to Kanpur.

Battle of Fatehpur

Renaud reached the outskirts of Fatehpur on the July 10. The station was then in rebel hands. The British officials, except judge Tucker, had deserted the station after the local sepoys mutinied. Renaud was impatient and wanted to capture the station and thus win laurels for himself. A large force of Tatya's men under Jwala Prasad was kept

waiting there to annihilate the advance guard. But Renaud escaped the trap albeit narrowly, which Tatya had laid for him. "Had he made the attempt, not a man would have lived to tell the tale."

In the dim grey of the morning of July 12, Havelock joined Renaud, thus foiling Tatya's plan. Jwala Prasad did not know of Havelock's arrival. Mistaking them to be only Renaud's men, he cannonaded their front and threatened their flanks. Soon the joint force fell on him. Capt. Maude's batteries electrified his troops and the enemy's round shots ploughed through them. A shot from Maude hit Jwala Prasad's elephant. The troops, seeing their leader fall, retreated after abandoning their guns. The cavalry fought ferociously but the enemy fire scattered them away. The town, along with eleven guns, was captured. Fatehpur was Havelock's first victory, and the first reverse for Nana's troops, and it had a great effect on their morale.

Clash at Aong

The next day stiff resistance was offered at Aong. After the Fatehpur encounter Jwala Prasad, augmented by fresh troops, retreated to Aong. It had a strong defensive position, with an entrenchment in front of the village, guarded by two 9-pounder guns. On both flanks the village had walled gardens, thickly studded with trees which afforded good shelter to the sepoys.

Both sides were hotly engaged. Nana's troops held themselves for four hours against heavy enemy fire. In the village they fought fiercely, but under repeated fire of

musketry they had to retire to the next position at the bridge on Pandu river, leaving many dead behind them.

A Great Tactical Error

The fine masonry bridge had a great strategic importance. But to his utter surprise, Havelock learnt from his intelligence that it had not been destroyed. The rebels had taken excellent positions and it was defended by an entrenchment and two guns of garrison calibre, though they had intended to blow it up as a last resort. The river was in flood. Havelock had no pontoons, and it was not easy for him to get boats in the hostile area. The destruction of the bridge would have retarded his advance to Kanpur. Not a moment was to be lost. Though his troops were tired after the day-long battle at Aong, he gave them no rest. His armies made a five-hour march under the sun to reach the vicinity of the bridge.

Tatya and his men were not unaware of its strategic importance either. He had given special attention to its defence, which was entrusted to Bala Rao. His guns could sweep the bridge and the Grand Trunk road beyond. His idea was to defend it as long as it was tenable and then blow it up. Pehraps he relied too much on his sappers and miners.

When Havelock's army arrived at the spot, its passage was hotly fought. The artillery duel lasted for some time, but two of the guns were disabled at a critical time. When the bridge was ordered to be blown up, it was done very incompetently, only blowing the parapet wall but leaving

the arch intact. Havelock crossed the bridge, captured the rebel guns, and forced them to retreat towards Kanpur.

Failure to blow up the vital bridge was indeed a tactical blunder for which Tatya has been rightly blamed. What was the point in wasting the energies of his men in a fight over the bridge which if blown up immediately after the retreat from Aong would have held up the British advance indefinitely ?

The mistake cost him dearly, because it made Havelock's passage to Kanpur—an important base of his future operations—much easier and quicker and enabled him to relieve Lucknow in time.

Battle of Kanpur

The Pandu river was crossed but Kanpur had not yet been captured. One more battle lay ahead—the final and the fateful one. News had reached Havelock that European women and children had been made prisoners by Nana. Speed was of the utmost importance, as he was anxious to rescue them as soon as possible.

Havelock's three consecutive victories had demoralized the nationalist army. This was their last chance. The battle of Kanpur was to decide whether the newly-revived Maratha Empire would survive or not. Great skill was shown in selecting the defensive position. One mile behind the junction of two roads—the Grand Trunk and the Kanpur-Cantonment road—the forces were drawn up in the form of an arc bisecting the two roads. Their entrenchments were thus cut and rendered both roads

impassable. Their seven guns were disposed also along this position which consisted of a series of villages. Behind these was posted the infantry.

Kaye has spoken highly of the strategic skill shown in the disposition of troops in the battle of Kanpur and wondered which of Nana's generals possessed such skill. The answer is not difficult to seek. As Sir William Hunter remarked, "whatever little military talent Nana displayed was due to Tatya Tope."[1]

Kanpur Falls

But once again the British general outwitted the nationalist generals. Havelock manœuvred to turn left and under the cover of mango grooves he encircled the enemy's left flank. The rebels did not at first understand the object of this march, but when they did, they charged with their cavalry and opened fire. The skirmishers were also engaged. The struggle was fierce and the slaughter great. But as Havelock pressed forward, he quite unexpectedly found himself in the enemy's battlefield—"stretched in the form of a gentle crescent, the rebel infantry in a battle array, supported by numerous horsemen and guns in their flanks. The scene was magnificent, yet overawing. Banners were flying, bugles sounding, drums beating as their general rode among the serried battalions... opened to make way for him. It was Nana himself came down from Kanpur to strike for victory."[2]

---

[1]Dharam Pal: *Tatya Tope*, p. 44.
[2]G.W. Forrest: op. cit., pp. 389-90.

At that time the British soldiers were worn out with marching and fighting during the whole burning summer day. They were reluctant to take up immediate confrontation. But all at once Tatya's 24-pounder opened, its missiles falling faster and thicker. Havelock's charger was shot, but he mounted again on a pony... "The only man who could raise his head, so close and thick was the fire that rained upon us... It was irresistible, the enemy poured in grape with such precision and determination as I have seldom witnessed."[1] But they pressed on, the ground was strewn with the wounded. Still they pushed on steadily charging the 24-pounder till they captured the unwieldy trophy of their valour.

It was the end of the grim battle of Kanpur, for after a hurried fire of musketry Nana's troops gave way. A heavy cannonade completed their total rout.

"Such was the battle of Cawnpore. The revolutionaries fought very well. Some of them did not retire even when swords clashed with swords. They saved their guns with determination and firing was also splendidly aimed."[2]

The battle of Kanpur was lost but Havelock was denied the fruits of victory. Utterly exhausted by continuous marching in the scorching sun and desperate fighting in battle after battle, his army could not pursue the rebels and, therefore, bevouacked that night without food or tents, two

[1]Ibid.
[2]Red Pamphlet.

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE-1

miles from Kanpur cantonment. It was already dark when the battle was over and taking advantage of the night the rebel army made good its escape. Thus Tatya was able to retrieve a large part of the army which within a month rallied round him again.

Tatya Appointed General

Nana and Tatya fled to Bithur. Defeat at Kanpur greatly dispirited Nana. His erstwhile kingdom was gone. He saw the valour of the sepoys, but what caused the defeat was the failure of the military leadership. A story is told how that very night Nana, disappointed by other generals, appointed Tatya as his general and commanded him to keep the banner of rebellion flying. From now on the initiative passed into Tatya's hands.

Havelock marched with his victorious army into Kanpur on July 17, exactly ten days after he had left Allahabad. But the satisfaction of rescuing his countrywomen was denied him, as the Bibighar captives had already been put to death.

Nana, his brothers and Tatya evacuated Bithur with their families on July 18, under cover of the night. Crossing the Ganges they took shelter at Fatehgarh Chaurasi with Chaudhari Bhopal Singh. On July 19, Maj. Stephenson marched to Bithur and captured the Peshwa's palace. The next day Neill arrived at Kanpur and Havelock began his preparations for the relief of Lucknow. By July 25, he had already crossed the Ganges.

Neill's Mailed Fist

After Havelock's departure Neill remained in charge of Kanpur. It was left to him to restore law and order and bring the guilty to book. Neill did not believe in half-measures, and soon he cowed down the city with a mailed fist. He believed that "severity at first is mercy in the end". So in order to avenge the massacres, he started on another orgy of massacre, more savage and more revolting. He wished "to show the natives of India that the punishment for such deeds will be the heaviest, the most revolting to their feelings and what they must ever remember". So ran the order he issued to the effect that each miscreant before his execution would be taken to the house of slaughter and forced to clear a small portion of the blood stains. He himself gloatingly gives us examples of some poor wretches who by flogging were made to lick the blood with their tongues, in shedding of which they probably had no hand. He wreaked his vengeance on all who, he suspected, had taken part in the mutiny.

Even then Neill failed to strike terror in the hearts of his victims. They faced death with extraordinary composure, "the Mohommedans with hauteur and an angry kind of scorn and the Hindoos with an apparent indifference altogether surprising. . .some of the Hindoos treated death exactly as if it were a journey."[1]

The battle of Kanpur was decisive. The fate of Kanpur changed the course of the nationalist struggle. The rebels

---

[1]Maude & Sherer: vol. I, pp. 251-52.

lost an important link with Lucknow, another nerve centre of the Oudh rebellion. It destroyed the nucleus of a potential power, and afforded a strategic base for the British operations in Lucknow, Oudh and the North-West Province, and thus weakened the rebel cause to a great extent.

VII. TATYA AS A GENERAL

AFTER THE DEFEAT of the rebel army at Kanpur, the initiative of the Peshwa's military activity passed into Tatya's able hands. Subsequent events show that Nana's choice of Tatya as a general was more than justified. While the nationalist struggle in Delhi lasted for four months, from May 11 to September 20, Lucknow fought for ten months, up to March 21. In Bihar, the Singh brothers gave a fight up to October 1858, but Tatya fought the longest—from July 17, 1857 to April 8, 1859.

If Nana was disheartened by defeat, Tatya was not. He set about the task of rebuilding the army. His main aim was to recapture Kanpur. The greater portion of the insurgent troops at Kanpur had escaped to Oudh to help the siege of Lucknow. It was apparent that Havelock would concentrate on relieving the beleaguered Residency. Tatya's plan, therefore, was to collect a large force at Bithur and strike at Kanpur again while Havelock was engaged at Lucknow. Within a month he had won over the 41st Native Infantry stationed at Shivrajpur and had collected a force of 4,000 men and 2 guns. This done, Tatya took possession of Bithur and threatened Kanpur. An alarming report sent to Havelock from Neill said that without Havelock's support "all the country beyond this and Allahabad will be up and our power and ammunition on the way up will fall into the hands of the enemy and we will be in a bad way". This brought

6708

Havelock back and on August 16 the battle of Bithur was fought.

Battle of Bithur

Here again Tatya showed considerable skill in selecting defensive positions. He was strongly entrenched behind thick ramparts flanked by walled quadrangles. The two villages, one on either side, and the town of Bithur at the rear supported the main position. In front were the dense plantations of sugarcane which provided excellent cover to the infantry. But this very cover was used by Havelock's men in screening their own movements and misleading Tatya. After a bitter struggle the guns were captured and Tatya's troops fled to the town. When pursued they offered stiff resistance. But the battle was lost. Once again the sepoy's valour had yielded to superior arms. But this battle earned a well-deserved tribute for them and established Tatya's reputation as a general. In his despatch Havelock wrote : "I must do the mutineers justice to pronounce that they fought obstinately. Otherwise they could not for a whole hour have held their own, even with much advantages of ground, against my powerful artillery-fire." And it was true of every battle. The revolutionaries did not lack courage, they lacked superior arms. As Sen remarks, "if Enfield caused the Mutiny, the Enfield also helped to overthrow the mutineers."[1]

[1]Dr. Surendranath Sen : op. cit., p. 207.

Kalpi as Peshwa's H.Q.

After the failure to recapture Kanpur, Tatya felt the need of having a stronghold which would serve as a base for his operations. His eyes fell on the strong fort of Kalpi. Situated on a precipitous rock on the right bank of the Jamuna and only 47 miles from Kanpur, Kalpi would be an ideal place from a military point of view. After Kanpur, no base would be more secure than Kalpi. He had not lost sight of his chief objective to recapture Kanpur. Kalpi was near enough to Kanpur and yet the Jamuna flowing between the two cities offered a natural barrier. It was centrally situated—from Fatehpur, Nana's place of exile, from Jhansi and Baroda, the two friendly kingdoms, and more important, from Gwalior, whose large army Tatya wanted to win over. He captured Kalpi in no time. When Nana came to know of it, he agreed to shift the Headquarters of the Peshwa there and sent Rao Saheb as his deputy.

Gwalior Contingent

In Gwalior, the Maharaja had a large retinue of 10,000, the majority of them being Marathas, while the 'Gwalior Contingent'—the native troops paid by the Maharaja but drilled and commanded by British officers—had more than 8,000 men, mostly recruited from Oudh. The main part of the force was stationed at Gwalior with outposts at Sipri and Agra. It was this contingent on whom the hopes of the nationalist rebels rested, and they were not belied. In fact, catching contagion from the revolt at Jhansi,

they had risen to arms as early as June, but they had been long inactive. When their friends at Indore and Mhow marched against Agra, they did not join them. They did not come to Kanpur's rescue when Havelock captured it. If they had joined Nana, the rebel cause would have gained immensely in strength and prestige. Actually it would have changed the course of the mutiny entirely. The Maharaja and his Prime Minister, Rajwade, who remained faithful to the British, had so far kept the army appeased by various devices, but mainly by the lure of silver. It was Tatya, the astute, sweet-tongued man who could weave a spell round his audience, who succeeded in seducing them. On November 9 they reached Kalpi and placed themselves under Tatya.

Campbell's Dilemma

In the meantime, Delhi had fallen. A surprise attack on Agra by the rebels had failed. The main struggle was now concentrated round Lucknow and Kanpur which became also the major base of concentration of the British forces. Sir Colin Campbell had been called back from the Crimean War, and appointed the C-in-C in India. In his sixties, Sir Colin was a war veteran with 50 years of military experience. His disagreement with Lord Dalhousie had led to his retirement from which he was recalled when the Crimean War started. He arrived in India in August, and at once began preparing to rush reinforcements to Kanpur. He arrived at Kanpur on November 3. Campbell's dilemma was whether he should go to the relief of

Lucknow first, or meet the Gwalior contingent, which had mobilized at Kalpi under Tatya. Nana also was reported to be on his way to join them in an attack on Kanpur. Campbell could not leave behind sufficient troops for the defence of Kanpur, in case it was attacked during his absence. But unless he relieved Lucknow at an early date the garrison there would not be able to hold out for long. He finally decided to leave Maj. Wyndham at Kanpur with a small detachment and proceeded to Lucknow. Wyndham was advised "not to move out to attack, unless compelled by threat of bombardment."[1]

Diametrically opposite views have been held on Campbell's decision. Malleson upholds the decision on the ground that Lucknow's need was greater "where the British had their soldiers, their women and their prestige,"[2] while Sir John Fortesque remarks that Campbell left Wyndham "in the same perilous situation, as Lord Gough at the opening of the first Sikh war."[3]

Attempt to Recapture Kanpur

Aided by the redoubtable Gwalior contingent and other levies Tatya advanced towards Kanpur. In a swift sweep he conquered a series of towns—Bhaginipur, Sheoli, Akbarpur, Shivrajpur etc.—between November 10 and 20 and reaching Jalaun threatened to swoop down on

[1]Dr. Surendranath Sen: op. cit., p .226.

[2]Malleson: op. cit., vol. IV, p. 105.

[3]Ibid.

Kanpur, while the Nawab of Banda and Kunwar Singh, in an attempt to cut down the British line of communications, had gone up to Fatehpur. Tatya's plan was to capture Kanpur before Sir Colin's return and cut off his base of operations. Speed was of the utmost importance. If he had appeared at Kanpur by November 13, when Campbell was still busy in Lucknow, he would have easily smashed Wyndham, but he was miles away from his destination.

Wyndham, like Sir Colin, had earned a name in the Crimean War. Unequalled in daring, Wyndham thought that, although some risk was involved, the better strategy would be to leave some troops to guard the entrenchment and attack the enemy in detail before he was able to concentrate. On November 17 he left Kanpur. Tatya reached Pandu river on 25th. On the November 26 Wyndham forced a division of Tayta's troops, who beat a strategic retreat, leaving two guns behind, If he thought he had cowed down the enemy, he was mistaken, because he had not yet met the main force.

Says Malleson: "The leader of the rebel army was no fool. The blow dealt by Wyndham, far from frightening him, had disclosed to his mind the weakness of the British leader. Tatya Tope read then the necessities of Wyndham's position, as he would have read an open book and with the instincts of a real general he resolved to take advantage of them."[1] The next day Tatya outmanœuvred Wyndham,

[1]Malleson: op. cit., vol. IV, p. 167.

his cavalry chasing the latter to the city which he could not hold, and he was forced to take shelter in the entrenchment. The whole city along with the stores and baggage fell into Tatya's hands.

As an English officer describes the scene, "the English troops with their trophies and their mottos and far-famed bravery were repulsed and lost their camp, their baggage and position to the scouted and despised natives of India! The beaten *Feringies*, as the enemy has now a right to call them, have retreated to their entrenchments amidst overturned tents, pillage baggage, men's kits, fleeing camels, elephants and horses and servants. All this is most melancholy and disgraceful."[1] The recapture of Kanpur was one more feather in Tatya's cap, who was described by his adversaries as "a man of very great natural ability."[2]

But this victory was too short-lived. On receiving a call for immediate assistance, Campbell had already rushed towards Kanpur. The entrenchment and the bridge-of-boats on the Lucknow road were still in British hands. But the bridge had to be destroyed before Campbell could cross it. It was a race against time. On November 29, Tatya rushed his guns to blow up the bridge, but only after it was too late. Campbell, equally aware of the importance of the bridge, had left his troops and convoy behind and had galloped with a handful of men. He

---

[1]Charles Bell: *Indian Mutiny*, vol. II, p. 190.

[2]Malleson: op. cit., vol. IV, p. 186.

successfully performed "one of the most difficult military operations—crossing a wide river in the face of an enemy thoroughly equipped with artillery".

On December 6 Campbell attacked Tatya. His strategy was to separate the Gwalior contingent from Tatya's troops and then smash them in detail. Tatya's army, though numerically superior—estimated to be 10,000—was composed of heterogeneous elements and raw recruits. Campbell attacked the right flank, its most vulnerable spot. But before it was routed Tatya pressed the enemy onto Bithur road, and breaking its network withdrew with his army and guns under cover of night. When on December 8 Hope Grant was sent to pursue him, Tatya had already gone from Bithur to Saraighat. On December 9 a running fight ensued between the two, and Tatya once again was forced to retreat. That was the last battle fought for Kanpur. But though his army was shattered and his guns captured, Tatya was to remain a menace to the British for a long time to come.

After beating Tatya back to Kalpi, Hope Grant next turned his attention to Bithur. It was reported that Nana had slept in the palace the previous night. It was not Nana's palace alone that was the target of the British wrath, but the sacred temples also. "The palace was laid low and his mosque blown up, and so completely that not one stone was left upon another." Hope Grant also recovered tremendous treasures which Nana was not able to carry with him when he had fled to Oudh in July and which had been thrown in the big well in the palace.

Thus from Bithur were wiped off even the last traces of the Peshwas' existence there!

But the last scion of the Peshwa family was still at large. He had to be eliminated. With Kanpur cleared of the rebels for good, there now remained only one place, Nana's last stronghold, which had to be destroyed. That was Fatehpur Chaurasi, 25 miles away from Kanpur, where Nana was reported to be hiding. Hope Grant reached there on December 17 and demolished the fort, but only after Nana had already escaped.

Peshwa's Army

After his last attempt to recapture Kanpur was foiled and Bithur sacked, Tatya transferred his activities to Central India—the territory lying between the Jamuna and the Narbada. This part of the country was still infested with many insurgent rulers. Jhansi, a major ally of Tatya, was already in rebel hands. The Nawab of Banda, a blood-relation of the Peshwa, had for some months now been in league with Tatya. Sometime in October, he was joined by Kunwar Singh, the old lion of Bihar who had been driven away from his capital, Jagdishpur. Dhar, with a minor king, was ruled by Ramchand Bapuji who had made a common cause with the rebels. Feroz Shah, a Mughal prince with a force of Afghans and Makarnis, had already entrenched himself in Mandsore and was a threat to Nimach. Mardan Singh, Raja of Banapur, had established his authority over a greater part of Sangor. At Rahatgarh, the Nawab of Ambapani had garrisoned the fort. Garha-

kota also was in rebel hands and Bundela Chiefs were marauding the neighbouring area. A little down south, Jubbulpore troops had also mutinied.

With Delhi captured, Lucknow relieved and Kanpur finally cleared of the rebels, the tide of fortune had turned against the nationalist forces. Even then, the rebel leaders were determined to carry on the struggle to the bitterest end. Well-entrenched in Kalpi, Tatya now started organizing his army. A small force and a magazine was already there under Rao Saheb. Besides, he had extricated a large part of his army when he escaped from Kanpur. In the meanwhile, the Rajas of Banapur and Shahgarh, the Dewan of Despat, Deolat Singh, Kuchwaya Kharwala and a host of others joined him. Tatya now reorganized the 'Army of the Peshwa', 20,000 strong, with about 30 guns. Thus fully rearmed, he now waited for the army of Sir Hugh Rose which was advancing into Central India.

Central Indian Field Force

It was not till the end of the year 1857 that a regular plan was drawn up by the British for the campaign in Central India. According to this plan, the Central India Field Force under the command of Sir Hugh Rose was to be assembled at the Narbada for operations against Chanderi and Jhansi. On its left, another column, the Rajputana Field Force under Maj.-Gen. Roberts was to proceed from Bombay *via* Nasirabad onto Awah and Kotah; while the third, the Saugor Field Force consisting of Madras troops was to start from Jubbulpore under Whitlock

and march across Bundelkhand and Banda. The three columns were to form a part of a combined plan and support one another.

Sir Hugh had a long experience in the art of war as well as diplomacy. Before he came to Bombay in September 1857 to assume command of the Poona Division, he was attached to the Headquarters of the French Army as Queen's Commissioner during the Crimean War. Starting from Mhow Sir Hugh opened his campaign with an attack on Rahatgarh. He defeated the troops of the Raja of Banapur who had come to its aid. He then advanced unopposed to Saugor. After seizing Garhakota and a few other forts, Sir Hugh turned his attention to Jhansi. But while a few miles from Jhansi, he found that Tatya had suddenly appeared at Charkan, the capital of a small Bundela State of the same name. After 11 days of fight he had captured the town, had taken 24 guns and three lacs from the Raja. The besieged Raja, who had remained loyal to the British, sent an urgent appeal for succour to his British ally.

It was a very strategic move on Tatya's part, for Sir Hugh now was faced with a dilemma. Should he first go to the rescue of the Raja of the Charkari whose defeat was imminent or move against Jhansi as planned? Sir Hugh was advised to run to the help of a faithful ally, otherwise it would spread the rebel aggression and damage British prestige amongst the native allies. If he attacked Jhansi, Tatya would march to its relief and make it very hot for the British. But Sir Hugh acted against this advice. He argued that the fort of Charkari would fall even

before he could reach there. If he attacked Jhansi, Tatya was bound to come to its aid, which would automatically relieve his pressure on the Charkari fort. He, therefore, stuck to his original plan, and advanced towards Jhansi.

Siege of Jhansi

The siege of Jhansi began on March 22. On the 25th the batteries opened fire and began cannonading the ramparts. All the points of entrance and exit to and from the fort were closed. The fort was strong, so was the garrison comprising 10,000 Bundelas and Afghans, 1,500 sepoys and about 30 guns manned by skilled gunners. The men were devoted to the Rani and, under her inspiring guidance, they fought valiantly against the bombardment and galling fire of the enemy. "Their guns never ceased firing except at night. Even women were seen working in the batteries and distributing ammunition."[1] Rose himself could not but admire them, as in a despatch he said: "The maner in which the rebels served their guns, repaired their defences, reopened their fire from batteries and guns repeatedly shut up, was remarkable. From some batteries they repeated shot after shot."[2]

But, in spite of the heroic resistance by the Rani's men, the heavy bombardment by the enemy battered down their bastions and most of their best guns were silenced by the 29th. The next day there was a breach in the city wall.

[1]Dr. Surendranath Sen: op. cit.

[2]Ibid.

While they were desperately waiting for succour from Tatya. The Rani had to pass many anxious hours before clouds of dust told her of Tatya's approaching army.

Battle of Betwa

With the arrival of Tatya at the head of a large army of 20,000 on the outskirts of the city, Sir Hugh Rose found himself sandwiched between the two fronts of the enemy. But this was not unexpected, and he had already made plans for it. He decided to continue the siege uninterrupted and by a brilliant manoeuvre he marched with a small force to meet Tatya. On April 1 the grim battle of Betwa was fought and once again the superior artillery of the British routed Tatya's army. The first line did not offer much resistance...Many did not offer fight and fled. Was it treachery or fear? To add to this, no cannon shot was heard from Jhansi. Seeing his first line routed and right flanking column driven back, Tatya who was commanding the second line decided to disengage. Before retreating, Tatya put fire to the jungle behind and under cover of this ingenious smoke-screen, salvaged a large part of his army.

But his mission to rescue Jhansi had failed. Who was responsible for the failure? Sylvester blames the Rani's garrison. "Why the garrison did not make a sortie and destroy our batteries while the Peshwa's army was attempting their rescue from without, it is impossible to imagine. Their over-powering numbers must have been successful, however well our infantry and gunners might have stood

to their guns". Sylvester further suggests that "they may have been deterred by a false attack made by Maj. Gall and Capt. Field on a distant part of the city wall."[1] Sir John Fortesque also attributes inaction on the part of the Rani's men to the fear created 'by a false attack' devised by Sir Hugh's orders. Their guns disabled, their best gunners wounded or killed and the city wall breached, no wonder they were overawed by the 'false attack' and did not take the risk of attacking the enemy. Instead they waited with hope for Tatya to win and come to their relief!

Fall of Jhansi

The fall of Jhansi was not far now. With Tatya repulsed, Sir Hugh took up operations of the siege with renewed vigour. The Rani, with a keen foresight, had adopted scorched-earth tactics in the surrounding area. But Sir Hugh had no dearth of provisions as the friendly Scindia and Orchha continued their supplies. On the 3rd a devastating assault was made which was countered with even more devastating fire from the defenders. They hurled at the enemy all sorts of missiles, earthen pots filled with powder, logs of wood, huge stones and what not. At last the rear gate was blown to pieces. But the entrance was closed by huge blocks of stone. Yet another party managed to enter through a small breach. The battle now raged in the streets leading to the palace. The Rani's

[1]J.H. Sylvester: *Recollections of the Campaign in Malwa and Central India*, pp. 101-02.

men fought like tigers. They fought with a ferocity unequalled by any during the entire rebellion. They put up a fight from every house, every room. Bullets fell like hail-stones. Every inch of the ground was contested. Ultimately the palace was captured but the Rani's body-guards still held the stables. "A party of them remained in a room off the stables which was on fire, till they were half-burnt; their clothes in flames, they rushed out hacking their assailants and guarding their heads with shields."[1]

The street-fight continued for two days and the city was ruthlessly sacked. The famous library of rare Sanskrit books was totally destroyed. Every man was suspected to be an enemy. Many fled away but "those who could not, threw their women and children down the wells and then jumped down themselves."[2]

The British were itching for vengeance because "the Jezebel of India was there—the young, energetic, proud, unbending, uncompromising Ranee, and upon her rested the blood of the slain, and a punishment as awful awaited her."[3]

On to Kalpi

But the Rani was not to wait for this punishment. That very night, taking an escort of faithful Afghans she jumped over the ramparts on horse-back in the garb of a man, her step-son tied to her back. She galloped through the

[1]Report of Sir Hugh Rose, April 30, 1958.

[2]Lowe: pp. 236 and 259.

[3]Lowe: p. 236.

flank of the Orchha guards who failed to recognize her. When her escape was discovered the next morning, the Rani was already miles away. A party under Lt. Dowker was sent to pursue her, but a group of her faithful guards engaged it in the way and was killed to the last man, thus playing for time till the Rani could reach Kalpi.

Shortly after the fall of Jhansi, the Nawab of Banda was attacked by Whitlock on April 19. After fighting a furious battle for seven hours, his troops dispersed, and the Nawab, extricating a large part of his force, also made good his escape to Kalpi.

Battle of Koonch

Jhansi had fallen. But Kalpi, headquarters of the Peshwa army, still remained to be conquered. It had become the rallying point of rebel leaders. Rao Saheb, the most active prince of the Peshwa family was already there with Tatya. The Rani of Jhansi had joined them and the Nawab of Banda also found his way there. Undeterred by his defeat at Betwa, Tatya, with characteristic resourcefulness, had again succeeded in collecting an army as well as guns. They were further reinforced by other disaffected chiefs.

They knew that Sir Hugh would soon be on them. In order to check the British advance on Kalpi, Tatya marched at the head of a large force to the strategic town of Koonch, 42 miles from Kalpi on the Jhansi Road.

The woods, gardens and temples skirting the city offered them good cover. Sir Hugh's attack came on May 7.

He made a triple attack on the town to force an entry into it. Tatya's troops held the position stubbornly. "His skirmishers fought well to protect the retreat of the main body; when charged, they threw aside their guns and fought desperately with their swords." Sylvester writes: "They cut and slashed our horses and men, so long as one of their band remained alive."[1] But by the time Tatya effected the final retreat, the greater part of his skirmishers had been killed, his artillery captured, the main body had lost nerve. When they retreated to Kalpi, "it was a long and helpless column of runaways".

Coup at Gwalior

After the defeat of Koonch, Tatya went to Chikri, a small town near Jalaun, ostensibly to see his parents who lived there. But from there he quietly slipped away to Gwalior, incognito, in a bid to make a last effort to win over the Scindia army. Tatya had some potential supporters in the city. The Naik Kotwal of Gwalior originally belonged to Bithur, a fact not known to the Maharaja and his Prime Minister. Tatya's son-in-law also lived there. It was perhaps through them that Tatya knew of the trouble brewing in the Scindia army. A majority of them being Marathas, they thought that Scindia was playing false to the Peshwas to whom he really owed his kingdom. He should, therefore, rally round the banner of Nana instead of backing the Company Bahadur's

[1] J. H. Sylvester: op. cit., p. 732.

Government. In the few days of his stay at Gwalior, Tatya realized that the situation was ripe for a *coup d'etat*. He had only to make his intentions known at an opportune time.

While Tatya was busy at Gwalior rallying support for their cause, an acrimonious debate was going on in the rebel camp on the defeat at Koonch. The infantry accused the cavalry of having pusillanimously abandoned them. The *vilayatees* were charged for not showing stern courage on which they prided themselves. Some of the leaders had even drifted apart. So great was their demoralisation that when the news was brought that Sir Hugh was coming down on Kalpi, several groups dispersed. "It was said that at one time only 11 soldiers were present in the fort and the town."[1] But the situation was saved by the unexpected arrival of the Nawab of Banda who came with a large force and guns. It was the Rani's exhortation backed by the Nawab "to hold to the last Kalpi, their only stronghold and win the right of paradise, by exterminating the infidel English."[2] that their despair was transformed into confidence.

Strategic Position of Kalpi

The fort of Kalpi was wretched as a fortification but as a position it was unusually strong. Situated on a steep and lofty rock, it was protected by deep ravines on three

---

[1]Lt.-Col. W. Malleson: *The Revolt in Central India, 1857-59* (Army H.Q. G.O.I.), pp. 128-29.

[2]Ibid.

sides, with the river Jamuna at the rear. Its fortifications were strengthened by lines of entrenchments. Tatya's forces occupied a strong position in the labyrinths of the ravines, in trenches across the road and entrenchments in front of 'Chaurasi'—the 84 temples built of solid masonry, two miles from Kalpi.

For Sir Hugh and his men, on the other hand, the march to Kalpi was a severe test of their nerve and fibre. The summer was in full swing. As Sir Hugh told his tired men, this formidable ally of the rebel cause was more dangerous than the rebels themselves. It played havoc among the troops, specially the Europeans who were already exhausted by night marches, sleepless night-patroling and fatigue. Many died of sun-stroke and thirst, as between Jhansi and Kalpi there were no streams, but only well-water. As a consequence their numbers were greatly reduced, though the "Enfield rifle made up for a good deal of inferiority in numbers".

To these military disadvantages was added the political cause. Sympathies of the inhabitants in the Jamuna valley were already with the rebels, as a result of a successful propaganda campaign by the Maratha Pandits in favour of Nana. The villagers too served the rebels by betraying to them the enemy's *Dak* or the movements of his army and the carts of provisions.

But a greater source of strength to the rebels was the feeling that they were defending their best-fortified stronghold in western and Central India and their only arsenal. Kalpi, on the right bank of the Jamuna in the hands

of the rebels, prevented concentration of the British armies in the West as well as in the east of India. "So long as Kalpi was in the rebel hands, so long they had it in their power to say that the east and west might be in British hands but that the pivot of its centre was theirs."[1]

Realizing the importance of the fort to the rebel leaders and the necessity of its conquest for restoring peace in Central India, the C-in-C had sent a detachment under Col. Maxwell to the aid of Sir Hugh. The general's policy was to follow and attack the rebels rapidly while they were still suffering from the defeat at Koonch.

On May 15 the first brigade encamped near Golauli, a place six miles from Kalpi. Small skirmishes between the two parties took place many times before the rebel armies finally attacked them on the 22nd. But the attack was repulsed.

The rebel leaders put up everything they had, but had to give up after a series of hard-fought battles. The next day, when Sir Hugh and his men sought their way through the maze of Kalpi ravines, they found the area and the fort deserted. Sir Hugh captured the fort without a single blow.

A Daring Stroke

From Kalpi, Rao Saheb and the Rani fled to Gopalpur, a place 46 miles from Gwalior. Tatya soon joined them.

---

[1]Ibid, p. 130.

Their position now was desperate in the extreme. Their last bastion had fallen. The insurgent struggle seemed to be on the wane. If they had to put vigour into it, their most urgent task was to seek a place which could serve as their base of operations.

The rebel leaders held a council in which the representatives of the sepoys also were said to be present. The sepoys thought that Oudh would offer the best field for their operations, while the Rani suggested Karera near Jhansi or any other place in Bundelkhand. But Tatya thought that the Bundelas did not take to them kindly and it would be difficult to get provisions. Rao Saheb was in favour of the Deccan. The time when the Peshwas ruled over the Deccan was not long past and the people still thought nostalgically about it, he said. It would not be difficult, therefore, to stir their hearts and rally them under the Peshwa banner. But their urgent needs were funds and supplies. The Scindia was their last hope. If an appeal to his instincts of loyalty to his old master, the Peshwa could win him over, it would immensely boost their cause, as other chiefs would also follow his example.

It seems that the plan got a general approval. The jubilation over the capture of Kalpi was still going on in British camp and an order by Sir Hugh congratulating the troops for their splendid achievement was still in circulation, when the startling news of the capture of Gwalior by the rebels arrived. This daring counter-stroke of strategy took the British by complete surprise. Sir Robert Hamilton

thought it was unbelievable. "The idea was as original and daring as the seizure of Arcot," said Holmes.

But which of the three Maratha leaders master-minded this brilliant coup? Malleson gives the credit for it to the Rani. While agreeing with this, Majumdar rules out Rao Saheb who, he says, "never distinguished himself in any way", and also Tatya Tope because "he never claimed the credit even when he had an opportunity of doing so" while giving his deposition. But Holmes favours Tatya who was as daring and resourceful as the Rani. According to Macpherson's report, corroborated by Sir Robert, "Tatya anticipated the evacuation of Kalpi by a visit to Gwalior. It was he who contacted the Scindia's troops and their officers and convinced Rao Saheb that Gwalior would fall an easy prey to them."[1]

Gwalior Falls to Tatya

Whosœver the author of the plan, Gwalior fell to Tatya without a single shot. On May 31 the rebel army reached eight miles from Gwalior. No resistance whatsœver was offered to them on the border. The Scindia went to fight the rebels but, except his bodyguards, the troops refused to fight. The insurgents raised the cry of '*Deen*' and the Scindia troops responded and fraternised with them. Without even bothering for the safety of his seraglio, the terrified Maharaja fled with his bodyguards and "did not draw his reins till he reached Agra".

---

[1]Surendranath Sen: op. cit., p. 294.

On June 1, the three Maratha leaders entered the city triumphantly. Nana was proclaimed Peshwa and Rao Saheb, dressed in usual finery was installed as his viceroy amidst ceremonies performed with great eclat.

The rebels neither disturbed the administration nor the staff. The city was not looted and no acts of violence committed. Only the vast hoarded treasure was confiscated for payment of the troops.

"The seizure of Gwalior created a sensation in India equalled only by that which was caused by the earlier mutinies."[1] Gwalior in rebel hands meant cutting off of the British communications with the south and Bombay. Besides, Gwalior had fallen at a time of the year most unfavourable for military operations, that is, on the eve of the rainy season when the summer heat was maximum. If Gwalior was not quickly wrested from the rebel hands, it would give Tatya an easy access to the Maratha territories now very much denuded of troops. Sir Hugh's worst fears were that with the acquisition of immense political influence and military strength which the possession of Gwalior gave them, Tatya, leaving the defence of Gwalior to other leaders might himself march southwards and unfurl the standard of the Peshwa. Indore too may follow the example of Gwalior. It was vitally important to check Tatya's further movement before the rainy season set in.

Losing no time, Sir Hugh drew up a comprehensive plan for recapturing Gwalior, forestalling any move by Tatya.

---

[1]Malleson: op. cit., p. 397

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE-1.

Leaving Kalpi on June 6, he reached Morar cantonment, now in rebel hands, on the 16th. He dislodged the rebels from there and cleared the Agra-Gwalior road. This enabled the brigade under Smith to reach Kota-ki Serai, a place four miles from Gwalior.

Battle of Kota-ki-Serai

During the 18 days the rebels got in between, they apparently did nothing either to consolidate their position or to prepare to meet the inevitable onslaught, much to the chagrin of the Rani who is said to have resented the waste of time and money on the installation ceremony. It was only when the enemy was almost at the door that Tatya requested the Rani to take the lead and organize for the battle. Accordingly, the rebel troops took up the strategic position behind the range of hills at Kota-ki-Serai. This position was most suited to check the advance of the British troops as it commanded the road to Gwalior.

Smith, who was in charge of this battle, made a ferocious attack on the Rani's forces, which was countered by stiff resistance. "Clad in the attire of man and mounted on horseback, the Rani was seen animating her troops throughout the day." The next day, Smith received reinforcements from Wrens, Ricks and Hennage.

The Rani Dies in Glory

Pressing forward inch by inch in the face of heavy enemy fire, the British troops crossed through the pass. On reaching the summit, Smith made a frontal attack with

his Hussars which the Rani faced with supreme courage. But the charge was so impetuous that the Rani's men could not withstand it. When many of her men were cut to pieces, she had to retreat. While fleeing, her horse refused to leap a canal when she received a shot in her side and a sabre cut on her head. Ramachandra Rao, her faithful follower, carried the mortally wounded Rani to a nearby hut where she soon died and was quickly burnt before any dishonour could be done to her body. Thus died the Rani of Jhansi in a blaze of glory. She earned a well-deserved tribute from her adversary Sir Hugh Rose who spoke of her as "the best and the bravest military leader of the rebels".

The death of the Rani greatly disheartened Tatya's troops who were holding positions extending from Phulbag to Lashkar. Next day his troops, along with the main body of the troops in the fort, came out to attack Sir Hugh but after a short fight were beaten back. Thus on June 19 Gwalior fell into British hands. The next day the fort was captured and Maharaja Jayaji Rao was re-installed on his *gaddi*.

The victory of Gwalior was celebrated by a gun salute at every principal station in India. Robert Napier pursued the fleeing rebel leaders. They were overtaken on June 22 at Jaora Alipur. There was hardly any resistance and the battle was over in a few minutes. But Tatya and Rao Saheb escaped across the Chambal into Rajputana.

With the main strongholds of the rebel army liquidated, the Rani of Jhansi dead, and all the rebel leaders scattered,

the backbone of the rebellion in Central India was broken. Sir Hugh thought his mission was over. Next day he relinquished his charge to Sir Robert Napier for reasons of health.

VIII. THE MARATHON RACE

BUT, OBVIOUSLY, Sir Hugh Rose had not reckoned with the spirit of the Maratha General, which had remained unbroken. All his guns were lost. The 'Peshwa's Army' was in shambles. He had no foothold anywhere. He was surrounded by the British forces on all sides. Yet he refused to accept defeat. In a few days' time the cities, forests, valleys and mountains in Central India reverberated with the war-cry of Tatya Tope. From his defeat at Jaora Alipur on June 22, up to his final capture on April 7 the following year, Tatya fought a marathon battle against several pursuing columns of the enemy, which earned him the reputation of being one of the greatest guerilla leaders of the world.

After Sir Hugh's departure, the Central India Field Force was broken up into divisions. The Gwalior Division under Napier included Jhansi and Kalpi garrisons with Sipri and Guna. The brigade of the Rajputana Field Force was placed under Maj.-Gen. Roberts at Nasirabad, while another at Nimach was commanded by Parke. Brig. Smith had one at Sipri. Malwa Division was under Maj.-Gen. Michæl with H.Q. at Mhow. Yet another brigade of the Bengal Army under Brig. Showers was at Agra. These half a dozen armies formed the inner ring, while there were forces on the outer ring of the girdle. "There were divisions, brigades, regiments, and detachments of

troops, regular and irregular, commanded by officers of all ranks. Each fresh commandant who took the field fancied he could catch Tatya....New aspirants for a C.B. and 'Tatya's head' would keep on coming".[1] But Tatya out-manœuvered them all and swept over the entire region as "one pack of hounds after another took up the hunt" against him.

Popular Support

With the crushing defeat at Gwalior, the insurgent struggle passed into another phase. Tatya seemed to have realized that their struggle could not go on without popular support. The people were not hostile to the rebel cause, but they were not free from fear of the rebel troops. The embers of rebellion seemed to be dying out everywhere and the British were emerging as masters. Tatya saw that he must seek cooperation of the people. He now sent advance parties into villages to announce, either by the beating of drums or by pasting posters issued in the name of Rao Saheb, that their army was fighting the British *ferangis* and not the people and that they should not abscond on their arrival for fear of molestation or plunder. Everything that their army needed would be purchased even at higher rates, but if refused, would be forcibly taken.

Tatya's next problem was of raising an army. He turned his attention to the troops in the Indian states. He still

---

[1]J.H. Sylvester: *Recollections of the Campaign in Malwa and Central India*, pp. 196-97.

hoped to count on their loyalty and the fact that he was always able to build up forces in considerable strength shows that his hopes were not belied. Tatya also got the support of the tribes and local people. His army now consisted of the *Vilayatees*, *Bundelas*, and even robbers who were expert shots and were good for fighting in jungles.

Changed circumstances changed Tatya's military strategy too. It was now hit and run. Not fighting the enemy face to face but engaging him in guerilla-warfare. For this, he had the requisite knowledge of the territory in which he was to operate. He now moved in small groups which facilitated their escape if attacked.

Sylvester's Impressions

Sylvester, who participated in this desperate 'hunt' for Tatya, has vividly described his experiences of Tatya's amazing guerilla warfare. "The swift-footed guerilla chief...carried no tents, no provisions. These he looted as he wanted them ... when his horses were worn out he left them on the road to die and replaced them in the same manner, sometimes from our post-stations and sometimes by attacking our long lines of baggage trains. His Light Horse would hover round us like shadows and always get away from our over-worked Irregular or over-weighted Regular Cavalry. Each fresh commandant fancied he could catch Tatya ... then prodigious marches were made, officers and men threw aside their baggage, even their tents and accomplished upwards 40 miles daily, but the rebels

did 50. The end was that our horses were all sore-backed and a halt of a week or ten days rendered absolutely necessary....It was wonderful the amount of energy that was thrown in the pursuit, and hundreds of dead camels strewn over every jungle track; roads were no objects, or rivers either, to the pursued or the pursuers. On they went until dead beaten."[1]

Sylvester further writes how people helped Tatya. "They had the best of information and never trusted themselves to the open country, when any force was near. We had the worst of information, even in the territories of professedly friendly Rajahs. The sympathy of the people was on their side. They appeared to have no difficulty in obtaining supplies, while our columns were straited for grains."[2]

The Race Begins

After his defeat at Jaora Alipur, Tatya accompanied by Rao Saheb and the Nawab of Banda, crossed the Chambal and fled towards Jaipur. But as his movement there was anticipated, he was forestalled by Roberts. Tatya then marched to Tonk. The terrified Nawab taking a few followers with him shut himself up in the fort and left four guns and his troops to face Tatya, whom they joined *en masse*. Thus reinforced Tatya moved towards Bundi, but the Maharao of the State shut the walled city against

[1] J. H. Sylvester: op. cit., pp. 196-98.

[2] Ibid.

him. So he pushed on to Udaipur with Holmes giving him hot chase. But before Holme's flying columns could intercept him, he had reached Banswara. Here he was met by Roberts and, after a brief encounter, Tatya escaped to Kankroli. Another skirmish with Parke on the river Banas followed, after which Tatya moved towards Chambal. Though the river was not fordable, Tatya crossed the mighty stream and appeared at Jhalarapattan, the capital of the native state Jhalwar, while Parke had to give up the pursuit because the river was in flood. Tatya tried to win over the army of Jhalwar and levied on the State a contribution of Rs. 60,000, collected more than Rs. 40,000, seized 30 guns and enlisted a large number of troops.

Attack on Indore

The beginning of September saw Tatya leave the city at the head of a large army and march towards Indore. He had broken through the circle which was tightening round him. It seemed an impossible task but he achieved it by putting the enemy on a false scent. "It is impossible to withhold admiration from the pertinacity with which the scheme was carried out," writes Malleson.[1] But his move was foreseen by Michael, and he covered Indore by sending a force to Ujjain under Col. Lockhart while he himself went on Tatya's track. He found Tatya's force encamped for the night near the walled town of Rajgarh. He, therefore, postponed the attack till the next morning

[1] Col. G.B. Malleson: op. cit., vol. III, p. 341.

to give rest to his tired troops. But the next morning, he discovered that Tatya's troops had disappeared during the night. He chased them till he caught the fleeing army at Biowra and defeated them capturing 27 guns.

Undaunted by these defeats and reverses, Tatya now shifted his operations to Bundelkhand. The monsoon had set in by now and he got some respite which he badly needed. Soon he attacked Isargarh and made good the loss of his guns. Then, dividing his troops, he marched against the strategic fort at Chanderi, while Rao Saheb proceeded towards Lalitpur, a city near Jhansi. Tatya had hoped to win over the Scindia's troops guarding Chanderi. But they refused to oblige him. So from there he went to Mangrolli where he was overtaken and defeated by Michael on October 10, but Tatya escaped after crossing Chambal joined Rao Saheb at Lalitpur. and But soon they found that all their routes were blocked.

Tatya Crosses Narbada

Undaunted, Tatya now accomplished a feat which sent a wave of alarm all over India. Dodging the British commanders who were at his heels, he succeeded in crossing the river Narbada. Lt.-Col. Beecher, marching from the Deccan to join Michael, failed to check his advance. With a substantial force, and accompanied by Rao Saheb, Tatya appeared 40 miles from Hoshangabad in what is now Madhya Pradesh.

Tatya's crossing of the Narbada caused widespread

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE-1.

panic. Here was the nephew of the last reigning Peshwa on the Maratha soil with an army! "It was impossible not to fear lest the army of Tatya should rouse to arms the entire Maratha population." The Government of Bombay felt concerned. Its tremors reached even up to Madras.

But these fears failed to materialise, even though it was a very during move.

Writing about it Malleson says: "Thus in the dying agony of the Mutiny was accomplished a movement which if carried out twelve months earlier... would have produced an effect fatal for British supremacy, would have roused Western Presidency, kindled Nizam's dominions and would have penetrated to South India."[1]

But contrary to Tatya's expectations, the people of this country of the Bhonsalas, whose annexation a few years ago had shaken them to the core, showed a marked apathy towards Tatya. He wanted to push towards the south across the river Tapti and enter the Maratha region, but he found his enemy on the alert. Beecher had already installed himself in the south. It was a tantalizing experience for Tatya and Rao Saheb to be separated by the narrow Satpura range, beyond which lay the country of Nana's rightful inheritance. Foiled in his attempt, Tatya then pushed on to Asirgarh. The region was comparatively safe and he moved on further to Kurgaon, a decayed town in Nimar, where some of Holkar's mutinous troops joined him.

---

[1]Col. G.B. Malleson: op. cit., vol. IV, pp. 239-40.

A Dream Unfulfilled

Thus reinforced, Tatya pushed westwards on October 23, crossing the great Bombay-Agra highway and looting the carts carrying the British supplies and snapping telegraph wires. His aim was to strike at Baroda, another State with a Maratha dynasty and court largely sympathetic to the Peshwa. But fearful of this move, the British had him trapped from all sides. Tatya's way to Gujarat was blocked by Roberts, Parke was already on his track from the east, while Brig. Hill shut him out of Khandesh in the west. He found Sutherland's column facing him across the Narbada. The river Narbada, 50 yards wide flowed between them, its banks high and difficult. To cross it in the face of an enemy twenty times superior in number was a physical impossibility. But Tatya did it. Plunging boldly into the river, Tatya made a dash towards Baroda. It was his last chance. During this hot pursuit "his men were able to display that capacity for rapid marching in which natives of India are unsurpassed", writes Malleson, "I might say unequalled by any troops in the world."[1] But his pursuers were too many. The city was only 50 miles away when he was intercepted by Parke near Chhota Udaipur on December 1. And thus he saw his last chanec slip through his fingers.

A Desperate Situation

Now that their dream of winning Baroda over to their side was shattered, Tatya and Rao Saheb took shelter in

---

[1]Malleson: op. cit., vol. III, p. 350.

the forests of Banaswara, the southernmost extremity of Rajasthan. Their position was now extremely desperate. Taking advantage of the Queen's proclamation, Tatya's ally, the Nawab of Banda, had already left them and surrendered to the British. They were hemmed in from all sides. Roberts was protecting the west side of the forest, while Col. Somerset was sent from Mhow to guard the east and the south-east. The southern side of the Narbada was already closed to them. But the two leaders did not give up. They broke the cordon and entered Mewar for the second time with a view to exploit the differences between its ruler and one of his chiefs, Kesari Singh who helped them with provisions. Moving through Bhilwara Tatya again struck at Pratapgarh, the site of his earlier exploits, but his enemies gave him no respite and he was attacked by Maj. Rocke. A short skirmish followed and Tatya escaped to Zirapur, from where he was again dislodged on December 29 by Benson's column from Mhow.

Tatya's New Allies

The beginning of the year—1859—found Tatya moving in the territories of Kotah, another State in Rajputana. He was joined by two new allies—Man Singh and Feroze Shah. A Rajput chief of Narwar, Man Singh had no quarrel with the British but with his overlord Scindia over what he considered his rightful claim over his uncle's fief. Collecting a small force of 400 men, he had forcefully occupied the fort of Paori. But his subsequent dislodge-

ment from the fort by Napier had made him sore with the British. He, therefore, joined Tatya at Nahargarh just before the new year.

Prince Feroze Shah belonged to the Imperial Mughal family and had escaped from Oudh. After crossing the Ganges, he had successfully baffled the forces of Roberts on his way to Kalpi, but could not avoid an unexpected encounter with Napier at Ranod, from where he escaped with his battered army into the jungles of Aroni. He had now come all the way with the intention of joining Tatya, the glowing accounts of whose exploits had reached him from Chambal and Narbada.

The Ubiquitous Tatya

By the time Tatya came to know of the plans of the Mughal prince, he was encircled from all sides. An escape seemed absolutely impossible. But Tatya was too clever for his enemies. He rushed out of the jungles through a pass at Pratapgarh under the very nose of an enemy detachment and joined the prince at Indergarh in January. Referring to Tatya's escape, the 'Times' in its issue of January 18, wrote, "Tantia Tope seems to be ubiquitous. With half a dozen columns after him he manages to slip through them. Several native chiefs are friendly to Tatya which makes his arrest and chase difficult."

But reinforcements from the two princes did not alter Tatya's position much. Throughout his pursuit his followers had kept on deserting him in such large numbers that by now his army, combined with the troops of the two

princes hardly numbered 2,000. The enemy had tightened its net round Indergarh and there was no way of escape. They were almost checkmated by Napier on the north, Brig. Showers on the north-east, Somerset on the east, Smith in the south-east, Michael on the south and Brig. Honner, commanding the Nasirabad brigade on the west and south-west.

But, as Sen says, Tatya led all these British generals a jog trot. They vied with each other for the coveted credit of netting this arch-rebel. Imagine Honner's chagrin when he found Tatya missing from Indergarh just a day before he arrived there. But quite unexpectedly Brigadier Showers fell on him at Dewas on January 14 which intercepted his march to Jaipur. The Brigadier killed a large portion of Tatya's army but could not catch him as he had once again given them a slip.

"How they escaped is a miracle," says Malleson, while the 'Times' seemed to lose its patience with the Government when it wrote in its issue of January 20:

"Everybody in authority pretends to know where Tatya was yesterday, notwithstanding that he turns up tomorrow at a very different and distant quarters, which he could have hardly marched within that interval. They would compare him to a duck in a lake who suddenly dives and comes up where least expected!"

Tatya along with Feroze Shah had escaped to Sikar, the capital of a small Rajput chief, when Col. Holme's column pounced on them. The battle of Sikar was Tatya's last encounter with the British troops.

Into the Jungles of Paron

After their rout at Sikar the rebels dispersed. Six hundred men surrendered to the Raja of Bikaner, while negotiations for terms were started with the British on behalf of the two princes. Many petty chiefs, taking advantage of the Queen's proclamation also deserted them. It was obvious that the struggle now was hopeless and they would not be able to elude the enemy for long. Their safety now lay in moving not together but in small groups who could still play hide and seek with the enemy in the thick forests and vales that surrounded them. Tatya, therefore, decided that he should now part company with Rao Saheb and Feroze Shah. With two cooks, an attendant, three horses and a pony, Tatya took leave of Rao Saheb, his master and comrade-in-arms. The parting must have been heavy for both, as they stood firmly together through thick and thin since their conquest of Kalpi. They parted never to meet again as they were both destined to be executed.

While Tatya wended his lonely way into the jungles of Paron where Man Singh was in hiding, the two princes, parrying all assaults of the enemy, took shelter in the jungles of Sironj. But even here they could not rest long. The British armies, now determined to wipe out the last traces of the rebellion, started combing the jungles inch by inch. But they found that Rao Saheb and Feroze Shah had vanished into thin air. They were not heard of again till the rebellion had been finally crushed.

Tatya as Robin Hood

Tatya moved into the jungles of Paron unmolested and remained uncaught for some time. The past eight months had given no respite either to the pursuer or the pursued. This 'genius of flight' Tatya, as Sylvester described him, had kept the generals on their toes.

Sylvester likens Tatya to Robin Hood. Tatya's infantry consisted mostly of the local tribes and even of some robbers who "were good shots and fought well in the jungles, attired in green as backwoodsmen. Most of them were mounted on camels and ponies, the latter often shoeless and footsore, their feet bound up with rags to protect them from rocks. They bivouacked in some deeply-wooded glens at night and cooked their meals and slept, but always placed watchful pickets, and seldom could be surprised, and were often lost to us for days together. He was beaten often and as often reported utterly routed. This was a mistake. It was their custom to separate in small bodies when attacked...it facilitated their escape, but they always had their trysting tree, and rallied in a few hours... some of our best cavalry officers were in pursuit, but could not catch this genius of flight. No one ever saw him even in the distance until Man Singh betrayed him to us."[1]

---

[1]J.H. Sylvester: op. cit., pp. 198-99.

IX. CAPTURE AND EXECUTION OF TATYA

Till the beginning of April 1859 Tatya, the last and the greatest of all the rebels and 'the leading spirit of the drama', was still at large. He had defied all attempts to put a noose round his neck. When military tactics failed, the British took recourse to treachery. On instructions from Napier, Maj. Meade with his famous 'Meade's Horse' was already on his way to sweep the forest of Paron where Tatya was in hiding with Man Singh. Originally a Brigade-Major. with the Gwalior contingent, Meade had escaped to Agra when the contingent mutinied. During his several engagements with the rebels there, he had raised a regiment of cavalry which became famous as 'Meade's Horse'. In June, when the Scindia's own army rebelled and he himself had fled to Agra, Meade was selected to escort him to the camp of Sir Hugh Rose. After the recapture of Gwalior, he was commissioned by Sir Hugh to bring the rebels to book.

Man Singh's Apostasy

Man Singh did not have the toughness of the Maratha generals. A year's rough and tumble of guerilla activity had worn him out. The idea always rankled in his mind that he had become an outcaste so far as his feudal lord, Scindia was concerned. "What might not be the effect

of an offer of absolute pardon with the prospect of intercession with Scindia for the restoration of some portion of his property?" thus thought the British. "Tatya was still at large. But Tatya without Man Singh was assailable."[1] They, therefore, decided to play upon the selfish instincts of Man Singh. Soon he was seeking terms with the British. In the meantime, Meade managed to get Man Singh's Ranis and other members of his family to his camp and held them as hostages. This brought Man Singh too. Driven to desperation, he entered Meade's camp and surrendered himself on April 2. But the surrender did not bring with it a promise from his new friends that his *jagir* would be restored to him, the loss of which had turned him into a rebel. He sensed that the British wanted something more than surrender from him in return, and he was not unwilling to give it. Meade writes, "From hints dropped by Maun Singh at various times since his surrender, I was satisfied that he had it in his power to enable us to surprise Tantia Topee and I have done all..to urge him to establish by so signal an act of service his claim (to the Jagir) to the consideration of the Govt."[2] Meanwhile, Meade held Man Singh's family as hostages to force him to betray Tatya. Meade had the utmost difficulty in bringing him to the point of consenting to betray Tatya. At last on April 7, Man Singh agreed to put Tatya in Meade's hands.

---

[1]Malleson: op. cit., vol. III, pp. 370-75.

[2]Thomas Henry Thornton: *Gen. Sir Richard Meade*, pp. 70 to 73.

Tatya's Capture

Tatya already knew that Man Singh was in Meade's camp. As stated by him in his deposition, he was quite 'set up' by two months' rest he had enjoyed and intended to recommence his movements all over the country. It appears he was already in communication with the rebels under Feroze Shah, who were hiding in the Saronj jungle with 9000 troops. He was discussing with Man Singh whether to stay with him or go over to the rebels. He had spies in Meade's camp and Man Singh feared he would give them the slip, if he had the slightest suspicion of Man Singh's duplicity. Man Singh, therefore, arranged an interview with Tatya on a false pretext. He dissuaded Meade from involving himself or his European troops in the operation. He stationed a small party of native troops in ambush and led his unsuspecting guest 'to a hollow which he and Tatya were in the habit of frequenting.' At midnight, when Tatya was fast asleep, Man Singh's men came out of hiding and 'Tatya was secured and pinioned, his arms being seized by Man Singh himself.' His two cooks escaped in the melee." Tatya had on his person a sword, a *kukri*, three gold armlets and about 100 gold mohurs.

The Trial

The next day he was brought to Meade's camp from where he was immediately despatched to Sipri. On April 15, he was court-martialled on the charge of "having been in rebellion and having waged a war against British

Government between January 1857 and December 1858, especially at Jhansi and Gwalior".

The British Government was anxious to establish the question of his complicity in the massacres at Kanpur. They telegraphically asked Col. Williams, the Commissioner of Police, Kanpur, who was investigating the murders, to send all the relevant material to Meade's superior, Napier, but the information arrived a only day too late. No charge of murder could, therefore, be framed.

When he was informed about the trial and asked to collect evidence for his defence, Tatya calmly replied that he knew fully that "having fought against the British as I have done, I shall have to be prepared for death." He refused to take part in the trial.

In his defence he pleaded: "I have only obeyed in all things that I did my master's, Nana's orders, up to the capture of Kalpi; and afterwards those of Rao Saheb. I have nothing to state, except that I have nothing to do with the murder of any European men, women or children; neither had I at any time given orders for anyone to be hanged."

He declined to ask the witnesses any questions. As described by English officers and newspaper reporters present, he comported himself with dignity and bravery, replying briefly but clearly to pertinent questions courteously put, but dismissing unnecessary and flippant questioning with a curt '*Malum Nahi*' (don't know). The 'Times' correspondent writes that "a glance of great contempt is observed on his countenance when following the departure of some mediocre superior officer, but for

Maj. Meade Tantia Topee seems to have considerable respect."[1]

The verdict of the court-martial was a foregone conclusion. Forrest writes that "he was found guilty of the heinous offence charged and he was sentenced to death." He showed no craving for life. On the contrary, even before his trial began, he begged to be freed of his misery as quickly as possible. "Blow me from a gun, or hang me," he said showing the irons on his hands and feet, "but deliver me of these!"

He expressed no wish to see any member of his family, but spoke fondly of his children and prayed that since his aged parents had absolutely no hand in whatever he had done, they should not be punished for his actions. But he maintained to the last his innocence of the Kanpur massacres.

And Death

Tatya was hanged on the 14th of April at 4 p.m. on the parade grounds near the fort at Sipri, in a square formed by the troops of the garrison, amidst thousands of spectators silently and tearfully watching his execution.

No sooner were the irons removed from his hands, "he ascended the gallows with a firm step and placed his neck in the noose with the greatest *sang-froid.*"[2]

The body was kept hanging for public exhibition for

[1]Thomes Henry Thornton: op. cit., pp. 78-79.

[2]Ibid., pp. 79-80.

four hours, perhaps to strike terror in the hearts of the rebels who dared to oppose the British might. When it was brought down at dusk and the guard was withdrawn, many admirers, both Indian as well as Europeans it is said, flocked to get the last glimpse of the man who had brought the mighty British generals to the end of their tether. As a popular story goes, some of them even cut and took away the locks of his hair as souvenirs.

Was the Sentence Justified

The justice of the verdict on Tatya has been questioned by some writers. One of them, 'the friend of India', writes: "Among the horde of princelings, zamindars and adventurers who rose to command among the mutineers, Tantia Topee is the only one whose fate will elicit in India a solitary expression of regret."

Both Forrest and Thornton—the biographer of Meade, say that Tatya was sentenced to death according to the Law of the Land (Act XIV of 1857). The latter justifying the verdict remarks that "his complicity in the massacres though never was judicially established... but that he was 'particeps criminis'—whether as prime mover, subordinate agent or accessory, matters little—can admit of no reasonable doubt."[1]

Lt.-Col. W. Malleson (not to be confused with Col. G.B. Malleson) does not enter into legal polemics, but in a vituperative attack on Tatya calls him "a blood-thirsty

[1]Ibid., p. 80.

ruffian, for whom a thousand deaths would have been a light punishment."[1]

Forrest remarks that Tatya was guilty of the 'heinous offence' of waging war against the government. But waging war against an alien government is no heinous offence, though it may be criminal at the time in the eyes of the law. But the question is whether that law was binding on Tatya. Col. G.B. Malleson doubts if posterity will confirm the verdict given against Tatya and argues that "Tatya was no born subject of the British. At the time of his birth his master was the ruler. He was under no obligation to serve faithfully and truly a race which had robbed his masters."[2]

Besides, it is to be noted that no charge of murder was brought against him. Had not the British shown clemency to many other rebel leaders for offences similar to that of Tatya? But in Tatya's case we must say that the punishment was indeed greater than the offence.

Malleson has drawn an analogy between Tatya and Hofer, the national hero of Tyrol, who was executed by Napoleon. Posterity has condemned Napoleon. Both the heroes represented the national struggle against foreign rule. "Both were heroes to their countrymen—the one, a European, is still a hero to the world; the other a Maratha. Who knows," asks Malleson, "that in the nooks and corners of the valleys of Chambal, Narbada and Parbati, he is not mentioned with respect?"

---

[1]Lt.-Col. W. Malleson: *The Revolt in Central India, 1857-59*, (Simla 1908), p. 232.

[2]Col. G.B. Malleson: op. cit., vol. III, p. 397.

Malleson's words have proved prophetic. Not only in the valleys of Chambal, Narbada and Parbati, but throughout the length and breadth of his country, Tatya's name has been enshrined in the hearts of the people. He fought a losing war, but he fought it in the best traditions of the country and the nation will always remain proud of this great national hero.

X. THE END AND THE BEGINNING

With Tatya Tope died the last embers of the rebellion of 1857. The splendid way in which he carried on the struggle has earned him a niche in the history of India. His greatness lies in his undying spirit and devotion to the national cause. And he fought for it with the *sang-froid* of a *Karmayogi*. He won and lost with equanimity. He took the banner of revolt from his master and held it aloft till he could hold it no more. He fought even when he knew that it was an unequal fight and the struggle was hopeless. Rebel chiefs came to him and then left him. Troops deserted him in such large numbers that many a time his army was in shambles and he had to begin anew. Yet reverses and defeats, though sometimes heart-breaking as well as back-breaking, never disheartened him. His spirit remained unbroken. He remained undefeated, and had the British not caught him by treachery, he would have perhaps continued his fight for many more months.

His Martial Ardour

His martial ardour coupled with a wonderful stamina, made his enemies hold their breath. In his marathon race that lasted nine months, from his defeat at Jaura Alipur to his capture by Meade, he made more than twice the tours of Rajputana and Central India, covered 16,17,000 sq. miles, crossed the Narbada to and fro. An incomparable

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East)

feat by any standard! He kept the area in a state of constant fervour. He sacked enemy stations, plundered treasuries, emptied arsenals, swooped on baggage-trains and post-carts. He led the generals a merry dance. And yet these generals were no ordinary men. As Malleson says: "too much of praise can scarcely be awarded to the generals who carried the pursuit. Their marches were wonderful. Brig. Parke covered 240 miles in nine days; Brig. Somerset did 230 miles in the same period. Col. Holmes marched 54 miles in the sandy desert in less than two days, while Brig. Honner marched 145 miles in only four days.[1] They were always on their toes. They did these marches without tents, without proper comforts or rest. Yet Tatya always out-manoeuvered them. He moved through hills and jungles by the shortest routs. Rivers like the Chambal, the Betwa and the Narbada did not hamper his progress. His movements were like lightning. For weeks he did 30 to 40 miles a day. He marched between the enemy columns, behind them and in front of them. "Ariel was not more subtle," says "The Times," "up mountains, over rivers, through ravines and valleys, amidst swamps, on he goes backwards and forwards, sideways and zigzag ways...yet evasive as Proteus.[2]

His Achievements

His recapture of Kanpur on November 27 in a

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]'The Times': January 17, 1859.

bid to cut off Campbell's communications with the south when he was engaged in relieving the seige of Lucknow, the daring plan to seize the rock-fortress of Gwalior when Sir Hugh was otherwise engaged at Kalpi, and the crossing of the Narbada in a dash towards Deccan, were all master-strokes of strategy. That his successes were short-lived is another matter. His battle plans too were always objects of admiration for his enemies.

Much has been written about Tatya's resourcefulness, his power of persuasion and his gift of organization. There must be something in his personality which drew people to him. Several native chiefs flocked round him. He found friends not only among peasants but also among the aboriginal tribes. He succeeded in winning over the troops of several native principalities. The conversion of the Gwalior contingent and the subsequent coup there are the best examples of his power of persuasion. Several times during his guerilla warfare, he collected armies and lost them; he collected guns and lost them. But with his characteristic resourcefulness he always made up the loss. He has been eulogized for his remarkable gift of organization which he displayed right from the first battle of Kanpur. It came into sharper focus when he built up the 'Peshwa's Army'. In a letter congratulating Meade on the capture of Tatya, Sir Hugh Rose expresses no doubt that "of all the rebel chiefs who acted a part in the rebellion, Tantia Topee possessed the greatest enterprise as regards initiative and the most enduring resolution of character. His talents for organization were remarkable. You have no idea how

much talent he displayed in this way in the preparation of the so-called Peshwa's Army."[1]

George Forrest, who thought of Tatya as 'the ablest nationalist leader', has also mentioned Tatya's remarkable power of organization.[2] Malleson, who has written about Tatya in much greater detail than any other contemporary writer, speaks eloquently of Tatya's 'wonderful marches', 'a good eye for selecting a position', and a 'marvellous faculty for localities'. But Malleson's tribute is not without reservations. "All the qualities that he displayed would have been admirable," he says, "had he combined with them the capacity of the general and the daring of an aggressive soldier. He never exposed himself to action. A little more insight into enemy's weaknesses and a little more daring would have harassed the flanks of his pursuers...He was a guerilla leader, content to fire at the enemy and then run away."[3]

This criticism, though somewhat justified, is rather unkind because it overlooks the fact that, though Tatya had military training of some sort, experience of actual warfare he had none before he was called upon to fight against veteran commanders. Viewed in this context, Tatya's achievements would appear remarkable by any standard. It is, however, true that in all the descriptions available, of the

---

[1]Letter to Maj. Meade, Poona, dated 14-1-1860, quoted in *Gen. Sir Richard Meade.*

[2]G.W. Forrest: *History of Indian Mutiny*, vol. III, pp. 13-14.

[3]Malleson: op. cit., pp. 381-82.

6708

battles Tatya fought, we find he always preferred to be in command of the second line of defence. It was so in the battles of Bithur and Kanpur; it was so in the battle of Betwa. Unlike the Rani of Jhansi, he never liked to be in the thick of the battle. His defeats in the battle of Bithur and in the battle near Jhansi at the hands of a small force led by Sir Hugh Rose, while he had an army of 20,000 at his command, are otherwise unexplainable.

But if Tatya lost in battles, he won in guerilla warfare. If Tatya was a guerilla leader, as Malleson remarks, it was of no mean order. A man with an army of indifferent sorts, surrounded on all sides, yet keeping a posse of world-famous redoubtable generals playing hide and seek for months together, has hardly any parallel in the history of warfare. That is why a modern British historian, Percy Cross Standing ranks Tatya amongst the most famous guerilla leaders of the world. More than that, he calls him "by far the biggest brain produced on the native side of the mutiny...A few more like him and India had inevitably been wrested from the English."[1]

Freedom's Battle Won

For us he has become a legend, a byword in every home, a great national hero who laid his life at the altar of freedom. We lost the battle then, but not the battle for freedom, for as the poet says:

---

[1]Percy Cross Standing: 'Guerilla leaders of the world', quoted by Dharam Pal in *Tatya Tope*, p. 210.

'Freedom's battle once begun.
Bequeathed by bleeding sire to son
Though baffled oft is ever won.'

The British won it, but it proved to be a Pyrrhic victory, because the martyrs of 1857 did not shed their blood in vain. They lit the flame of freedom in every patriotic heart. The succeeding generations picked up their banner, took up their cry and marched ahead till freedom was won.

APPENDIX

WAS TATYA TOPE REALLY HANGED?

Was Tatya Tope really hanged? In other words, was the man who was hanged really Tatya Tope?

The question has been raised by some writers and students of history who believe that it was not Tatya Tope who was hanged but another man impersonating Tatya. They have produced evidence in support of their thesis which cannot be brushed aside lightly. Prominent among them are Shri T.K. Tope, presently Vice-Chancellor of the Bombay University, who is also a great-grandson of Tatya Tope's cousin; Shri S. Hardiker, the writer of *Athara So Sattawan*; and Dr. R.K. Dharaiya, Head of the Department of Political Science, Gujarat University.

Writing in a Marathi monthly 'Vasant' in its issue of August 1971, Shri Tope has forwarded several reasons for his belief that it was not Tatya who was hanged but probably one of his two companions who were with him when he was living in hiding with Man Singh in the jungles of Paron.

According to Shri Tope, a traditional story is current in the 'Tope' family that Tatya paid a visit in late 1859 (after his supposed execution) to his family at Yewale (his birth-place near Nasik) and stayed there for a couple of days in a cellar which is still intact in the ancestral house. From there he proceeded to Kopargaon on his

way to Poona, saying that he was going there to see if he could get any help. He expressed this hope to Trimbak Sadashiv Tope, Shri T.K. Tope's grandfather, who passed on the story of Tatya Tope's visit to his son, and he in turn to his son, Shri T.K. Tope.

Dr. Surendranath Sen's book *Eighteen Fiftyseven* pp. 231 to 234 includes a sketch of Tatya Tope said to be drawn by one Lt. Baug in Maj. Meade's army. This sketch does not at all resemble Tatya's other well-known photographs. It may also be seen that the sketch also does not tally with other descriptions that we have of Tatya. John Lang who had seen Tatya at Bithur described him as "a man of middle height and rather *slightly made*". The man in Lt. Baug's sketch seems to be quite robust and thick-set. He also does not have those finely drawn, arched eye-brows, which were a marked feature of Tatya's face.

Volume I of the book *Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India* published by the Bombay Government, includes some original documents regarding the capture of Tatya. A letter from the Assistant Resident of Baroda written on November 14, 1862, to the Secretary, Political Department of the Government of Bombay, encloses a report of his interview with Ram Krishna Tope, a cousin of Tatya, originally staying at Bithur but now shifted to Baroda in search of an employment. The report contains the following colloquy:

Assistant Resident: "Where is Tatya Tope now"?

Ram Krishna Tope: "I don't know where he is. Since he left us we have not met, nor have I heard of his whereabouts."

In 1862, when Tatya was supposed to have been already dead, this query about Tatya's whereabouts appears to be rather intriguing, particularly coming from a British officer of the Political Department. Why was such an obviously meaningless question asked? This report was in turn forwarded by the Political Department to Maj. Meade "to test the correctness of the statement by separate enquiry". Meade in his reply confirms other things in Ram Krishna Tope's statement "to be true and correct", but keeps silent as regards the above question on Tatya's whereabouts. Why did Maj. Meade not categorically say that the question about Tatya's whereabouts from the Political Department was absurd, that he himself had captured Tatya Tope and that he had been hanged? Does his silence on this point mean that he was himself not sure whether he had arrested and hanged the right person?

Man Singh is said to have betrayed and caught Tatya when the latter was asleep. Man Singh was a Rajput and it is difficult to imagine a Rajput behaving in such a way against his creed of honour and hospitality. It is possible that he was in league with Tatya and substituted someone else in his place. He may have played this ruse on the British in order to get the release of his Ranis and other members of his family who were held in Meade's custody as hostages.

Shri Hardiker also supports this view. Man Singh, in his opinion, was either in league with Tatya and handed over someone else in Tatya's place, or he did so in order to save his face after Tatya had escaped. Hardiker's latter

suggestion seems more possible. According to the Government report (whose source was either Man Singh or the sepoys who arrested him), Tatya's two cooks were said to have escaped in the melee that followed his capture. If the cooks could run away, surely a guerilla leader who was described by his enemy as a 'genius of flight' could have easily dodged a handful of sepoys who captured him!

Shri Hardiker further argues that the British Government did not restore Man Singh's *jagir* to him as promised, nor did it give him any other reward for being instrumental in Tatya's capture. Was it because the Government was doubtful about the identity of the hanged man?

The doubt is further strengthened by one more fact, namely, that after Tatya's execution the Government hanged two more persons believing them to be Tatya.

According to Shri Hardiker, the surviving relatives of Tatya at Bithur, like the Tope family at Yewale, declare that Tatya was alive after his so-called execution till at least 1862, as he often visited his parents at Bithur between 1859 and 1862 and rendered them monetary help.

Supporting the view that Tatya was not hanged, Dr. Dharaiya claims that after Tatya's parents died in 1862, Tatya shifted to Navsari in Gujarat in the garb of a sadhu called Tahaldas. He lived on a hill named 'Bavaji Hill' situated in the midst of the tank Doodhsagar. The arguments advanced by Dr. Dharaiya for his theory are: (*i*) Tahaldas called himself a Deshastha Brahmin which was Tatya's caste too. (*ii*) He often went to Gangrol, a village in the forest of Banaswara, where Tatya had once

escaped from the British army. (*iii*) When he came to Navsari, he had brought with him a person named Ramchandra who is believed to be Rambhau, a close companion of Tatya's earlier life. (*iv*) Tahaldas spoke Marathi fluently, Hindi fairly well and Gujarati also exceptionally well, as Tatya did. (*v*) He was an expert rider and had good knowledge of war and weapons. (*vi*) John Lang's desciption of Tatya tallied with Tahaldas's. (*vii*) The 'Tarikhe Navsari' gives *Samvat* 1871 (i.e., 1813-14 A.D.) as Tahaldas's year of birth which was Tatya's year of birth too.

It may also be added that there are some more points in the reports of Tatya's capture and execution which strike one as odd. One is the undue haste shown by the British authorities in hanging him. It is said that the British Government was very anxious to know about Tatya's complicity in the Kanpur massacres. They had telegraphically asked for the report from Col. Williams who was conducting the enquiry at Kanpur. And yet the military authorities did not wait for the report which arrived only one day after Tatya's execution. Why such indecent hurry? Did Meade have any doubts about the arrested person? The suspicion is further strengthened by the fact that none of the pursuing generals had seen Tatya. Sylvester who took part in this campaign clearly states this. "No one ever saw him," he writes, "not even in the distance until Man Singh betrayed him to us."[1] Thus anyone could have been passed on to

[1]J.H. Sylvester : *Recollections of the Campaign in Malwa and Central India,* 1860, pp. 198-99.

the British as Tatya.

Another point that strikes one as strange is Tatya's reported behaviour before his capture. Man Singh was frequenting Meade's camp with the full knowledge of Tatya. On the day of his capture also, Tatya knew Man Singh was in Meade's camp, and that he had surrendered to the British. Then why did he not give him the slip? Tatya was said to be tired of running. But it is also reported that five weeks' rest had 'set him up' and that he was planning to join the rebels in Saronj jungles and recommence his operations. Tatya's whole career suggests that he was not the one to accept defeat, least of all the ignominy of arrest and execution at the hands of an adversary whom he fought the longest. Tatya's reported indifference to his arrest, therefore, sounds inconsistent with his character.

Be that as it may, in view of the above arguments, we can only conclude that Tatya's capture and execution cannot be accepted as an unquestionably established fact.

It is well-known that Tatya (or the man posing as Tatya) had signed his deposition which he gave before his execution, and one way of establishing Tatya's identity with the man who was hanged would be to tally the signature on the dying deposition with Tatya's other signatures which he must have put on the several papers when he was working as Nana's chief clerk. Of course, this is possible only if any papers or documents belonging to Nana's office have survived the complete destruction of Bithur palace by Brig. Hope Grant in December 1857.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bell, Charles—*Indian Mutiny*
2. Dharaiya, Dr. R.K.—*Gujarat in 1857*
3. Dharam Pal—*Tatya Tope*
4. Forrest, G.W.—*History of the Indian Mutiny*
5. Government of Bombay—*Source Material for History of Freedom Movement in India, Vol. I, 1818-1885*
6. Joshi, Vishnu Shridhar—*Mrityunjayacha Atmayadnya*
7. Kaye, Sir John—*A History of the Sepoy War in India*
8. Lowe—*Central India during the rebellion of 1857 & 1858*
9. Malleson, Col. G.B.—*History of Indian Mutiny*
10. Malleson, Lt.-Col. W.—*The Revolt in Central India, 1857-59*
11. Majumdar, R.C., General Editor.—*The History and Culture of the Indian People—British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance Part I* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan)
12. Russel, William Howard—*My Indian Mutiny Diary*
13. Sathe, V.D. & G.D. Kewalker—*Sattavanche Hutatma*
14. Savarker, V.D.—*1857*
15. Sen, Dr. Surendranath—*Eighteen Fifty-seven.*
16. Maude & Sherer—*Daily Life during Indian Mutiny*
17. Sylvester, J.H.—*Recollections of the Campaign in Malwa and Central India*
18. Thomson, Capt. Mawbray—*Story of Cawnpore*
19. Thornton, Thomas Henry—*Gen. Sir Richard Meade*
20. Trevelyan, Sir George—*Cawnpore*

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE

NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY SERIES

BOOKS PUBLISHED

		Rs.
1.	Guru Gobind Singh—*Gopal Singh*	2.00
2.	Guru Nanak—*Gopal Singh*	2.25
3.	Kabir—*Parasnath Tiwari*	1.75
4.	Rahim—*Samar Bahadur Singh*	2.00
5.	Maharana Pratap (Hindi)—*R.S. Bhatt*	1.75
6.	Ahilyabai—*Hira Lal Sharma*	2.25
7.	Tyagaraja—*P. Sambamoorthy*	2.00
8.	Pt. Bhatkhande—*S.M. Ratanjankar*	1.25
9.	Pt. Vishnu Digambar—*V.R. Athavale*	1.25
10.	Sankaradeva—*Maheswar Neog*	2.00
11.	Rani Lakshmi Bai (Hindi)—*Vrindavan Lal Verma*	1.75
12.	Subramania Bharati—*Prema Nandakumar*	2.25
13.	Harsha—*V.D. Gangal*	1.75
14.	Chandragupta Maurya—*Lallanji Gopal*	1.75
15.	Kazi Nazrul Islam—*Basudha Chakravarty*	2.00
16.	Sankaracharya—*T.M.P. Mahadevan*	2.00
17.	Nana Phadnavis—*Y.N. Deodhar*	1.75
18.	Ranjit Singh—*D.R. Sood*	2.00
19.	R.G. Bhandarkar—*H.A. Phadke*	1.75
20.	Samudragupta—*Lallanji Gopal*	2.00
21.	Amir Khusrau—*Saiyid Ghulam Samnani*	1.75

22. Muthuswami Dikshitar—*T.L. Venkatarama Aiyar* 2
23. Mirza Ghalib—*Malik Ram* 2
24. Hari Narayan Apte—*M.A. Karandikar* 1
25. Ramanujacharya—*R. Parthasarathy* 2
26. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar—*S.K. Bose* 2
27. Surdas (Hindi)—*Vrajeshwar Verma* 1
28. Swami Dayanand—*B.K. Singh* 2
29. Jagadis Chandra Bose—*S.N. Basu* 2
30. Swami Ram Tirth—*D.R. Sood* 2
31. Chaitanya—*Dilip Kumar Mukherjee* 2
32. Motilal Ghose—*S.L. Ghosh* 2
33. Shyama Sastry—(*Smt.*) *Vidya Shankar* 2
34. Nagarjuna—*K. Satchidananda Murty* 2
35. Krishnadeva Raya—*M. Rama Rao* 2
36. Purandaradasa—*V. Sitaramiah* 2
37. Tulsidas—*Devendra Singh* 2
38. Namdev (Marathi)—*L.G. Joag* 2
39. T. Prakasam—*P. Rajeswara Rao* 2
40. Mahadeo Govind Ranade—*P.J. Jagirdar* 3
41. Madhusudan Das—*Surendra Mahanty* 3
42. Sri Aurobindo—*Navajata* 3
43. Srinivasa Ramanujan—*Suresh Ram* 2
44. Tipu Sultan—*B. Sheik Ali* 2
45. Basavanna—*M. Chidananda Murty* 2
46. P.C. Ray—*J. Sen Gupta* 2

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE-1

I/45/62/77,78
6708

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
BANGALORE CENTRE,
GANDHI BHAVAN
Kumara Park (East), BANGALORE-1.

6708

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA, was set up in 1957 as an autonomous organisation by the Government of India in the Ministry of Education, with the important object of creating a movement in the country to make the people more and more book-minded.

The activities of the Trust include organisation of exhibitions and book fairs, arranging seminars and workshops on problems connected with the writing, translation, publication and distribution of books.

Also in furtherance of its objective, the Trust produces and encourages the production of good literature and tries to make such literature available at a moderate price to the public.